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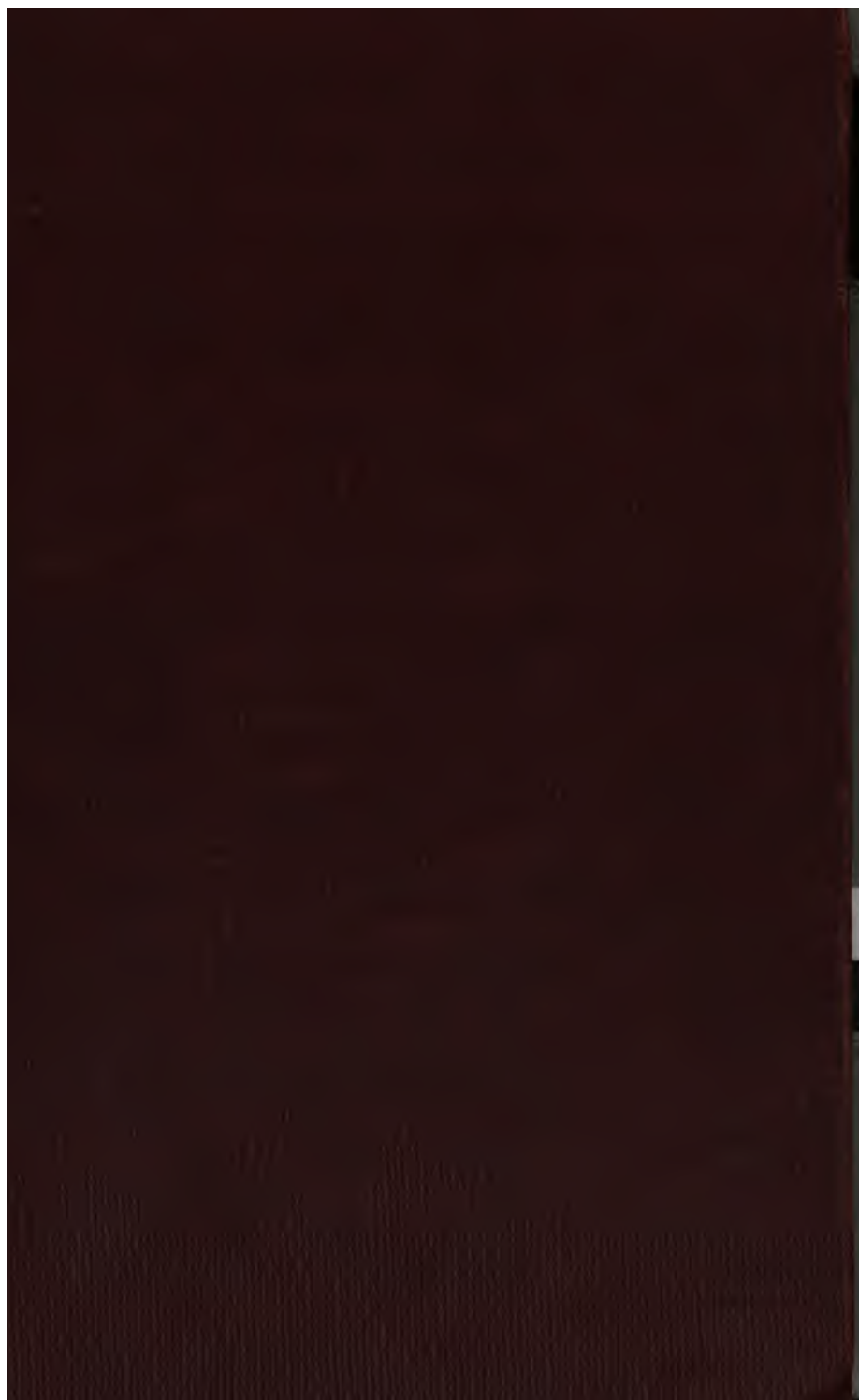
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INTRODUCTION TO  
DANTE'S INFERNO

BY  
ADOLPHUS T. ENNIS

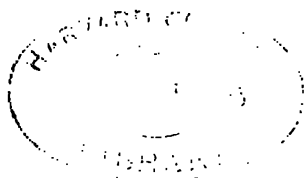
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## PREFACE.

The title given to this little book explains the object I had in view in writing it. It is not intended to be a commentary of the text of the Divine Comedy, nor will it furnish annotations of historical events and persons. The students of Dante, for it is meant for them, are supposed to be amply provided with works of that kind, and to make a free use of them in the intelligent reading of the lines. The "Introduction" is to fill, in a manner, the office of a mentor, the duty of a guide, standing, as it were, by the side of the reader who has determined to follow Vergil and Dante step by step in the journey through the dark regions of the city of woe. Like the shade of the Roman, it will point out in each canto, or chapter their actions, register their words, adding such necessary explanations and interpretations as can be warranted only by the concordant authority of an uninterrupted series of scholars, who, from the middle of the fourteenth century to our own times, have handed down, one to another, the torch of literary succession fixing thus the canons of the traditional sense of the poem.

From early youth, having naturally taken a special delight in reading Dante, the glory and ornament of my native country, I had often occasion to observe that it is quite possible to draw conclusions different and conflicting from one and the same canto, or single

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verses severally taken. The experience of maturer years confirmed the impression received in earlier days, making it evident that in such wise a path could be easily pioneered to opinions essentially affecting the aim and scope of the author. Could this arise from the objectiveness of the work, or from the subjectiveness of the reader? It may be stated, with all due reverence, that the same condition obtains in regard to the Sacred Scriptures. It is not necessary to be endowed with the gift of prophesy in order to be able to foretell that the future citizen of America would be individually in the same plight touching the meaning of the words of the Constitution, as originally written, if the traditional sense of it transmitted from generation to generation by the supreme court of appeal were to be disregarded, and the spirit of the times in which it was framed overlooked and completely ignored. This applies also to the poem under consideration, and in our case proves the necessity of consulting such authorities as from the present go back to the times almost immediately following the publication of the Divine Comedy in order to be reasonably sure that we have the meaning and genuine interpretation of the thought conveyed by the symbolism of language. Other arbitrary methods will fail.

For the proper understanding of the poem, the study of Dante's works becomes an absolute necessity, especially the "*Convito*," which contains the raw material eventually developed in the Divine Comedy, the "*Vita Nuova*," "*De Monarchia*" and the *Epistolary*. The lives

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of the poet by *Boccaccio* and *Leonardo Aretino* should also be carefully read.

The tenacious holding of certain opinions is often the cause of divorce between logic and action, erasing from the mind all that was patiently learned in the hard school of experience. And so it comes to pass that some do still persist in making the great Tuscan say what he neither meant, nor thought of saying. They waste a prodigious amount of erudition and energy to confine to the narrow limits of an epoch, or series of epochs, that which was intended to apply to all times. Peculiar moods of looking upon religious, ecclesiastical, social and political questions so disturb the clear judgment of scholars, otherwise distinguished for talent and eminence in the republic of letters, that they, perhaps unconsciously, restrict to the compass of a lyric song of a nation what was meant to be an epic poem of humanity.

That the Dantesque harp did vibrate to diverse tones, no one ever denied; but to mistake some minor phrases for the dominant note of the symphonic poem betrays a lamentable ignorance of the structure of the immortal composition. It is in the very nature of things that every effort made to bend the reality out of its objective shape to make it fit in with the subjective form of petty concepts and preconceived ideas must needs be a positive failure. Mr. James Russell Lowell says; "We protest against the parochial criticism which would degrade Dante to a mere partisan." Other American



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and many English writers have openly expressed the same opinion.

The "Introduction," an unpretentious contribution to the already accumulated wealth of Dantesque literature, is offered to the English reading public in the hope that it may help to enable some to distinguish the genuine from the apocryphal meaning of the *Divine Comedy*, and make, perhaps, its perusal a trifle easier and more attractive. The causes or reasons for the various and conflicting interpretations can be traced to the subjective qualities of the human mind, and the objective form and substance of the poem. A German scholar admits that having read it twelve times could not grasp its meaning. That Dante aimed at the moral reformation of man, individually taken, as a means to bring about the perfection of a political system, and thus ensure the welfare of mankind, is a truth that cannot be gainsaid. That he, too, indulged in the secular dream of the Italians to re-establish the universal monarchy of a second Roman Empire, in order to put an end to those internal fratricidal wars which, in his days, made of fair Italy an unweeded garden and a land of desolation, is equally evident. That the ardently cherished hope of this great patriot was the final triumph of the Ghibelline idea, we clearly know from the pages of his "*De Monarchia*." But far beyond and above these secondary considerations that, like the digressions in the *Aeneid*, are introduced here and there by the exile, burning with indignation against Florence, and all that rose up in opposition to his will, one, constant and predomi-

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nant thought reveals itself in every line of the Divine Comedy, breathing upon it the breath of life—the happiness, spiritual and temporal, of man, to be attained by obeying the law of his very being. Despair howling in the pains of Hell, Hope singing in the sufferings of Purgatory, Love exalting in the raptures of Heaven, are graphically described with the fire of Hebrew prophets, the charm of Hellenic poets, and the fascination of Mediæval bards to the end that man—man allured by reward and appalled by punishment may do good and avoid evil. Dante expressly says so in a letter to the Gran Cane della Scala. This apocalyptic message clothed in the most delicate of poetic embroidery is to be dedicated to a woman—Beatrice—whose pure and transcendent love inspired him to soar to dizzy heights borne on the wings of reason and revelation. What truths he contemplated there, what visions he saw, the poet will sing in a deathless song to the children of man, in order to crown her—the living transubstantiation of Theology—with the laurel of immortality.

Yet as man is born not to live alone, but in the society of his fellow-beings, the Divine Comedy indicates what political organization would be better suited to help him to attain that end which, as a member of a spiritual kingdom, he must have always in view. A universal monarchy is preferred as a more perfect form of government according to a line of arguments laid down in the "De Monarchia." Thus civil and ecclesiastical,

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philosophic and moral questions find a place in the scheme of the great epic trilogy.

This and much more the diligent reader will realize if he bring to the study of Alighieri a mind attuned to the harmony of logic, responsive to the note of enlightened criticism, and above all, a will quick to resent any attempt savoring of Hamlet reading the shape of the clouds. It has been said that the singer of Florence is pre-eminently suggestive and stimulating. If it be so ample opportunities will be afforded for independent exercise in straight seeing and clear thinking.

My object in writing the "Introduction" will have been accomplished if, by giving to the symbolism of words, and allegory of facts, that interpretation which canons based on intrinsic and extrinsic evidence can only sanction, it will contribute in the least degree to quicken the analytical and comparative faculties of the student of Dante, so as to enable him to arrive at the true synthesis of the Divine Comedy.

It is my purpose to offer to the public at a later date the "Introduction" to his "Purgatorio" and "Paradiso" conceived in the same spirit, and brought out in the light of the same criterions that have guided the present work on the "Inferno." To those who are not able to read Dante in the original I would recommend the prose translation of Professor Charles Eliot Norton who, in my opinion, has succeeded in the very difficult task of accurately rendering in English the Dantesque thought expressed in Italian.

THE AUTHOR.



## INTRODUCTION TO "DANTE'S INFERNO"

### CHAPTER I.

The poem opens with Dante wandering in a wood dark and wild, unable to account how he came thither on the previous night supposed to be that of Holy Thursday. It is now the dawn of Good Friday. At the edge of the valley looms up a mountain whose sides are bathed in the light of the rising sun; the wanderer, anxious to emerge from the encircling darkness and besetting dangers, hastens with alacrity to climb it, but at the very outset his courage fails. He is about to turn back at the sight of a spotted panther, a fierce lion, and a lean hungry she-wolf, standing in the way of carrying out his resolution.

The meaning underlying this symbolic introduction forms one of the basic truths upon which the edifice of the Divine Comedy is raised. Man has a sufficiently clear notion of right and wrong; withal seeing what is good and approving it, often he prefers and follows what is bad. In consequence of such ill made choice, he condemns himself to grope his way in the darkness of the valley of sin. At certain seasons, or periods, or epochs of earnest thought, of introspection and meditation, typified by Good Friday, the realization of the awful state apprehended by the intellect rouses the will to vigorous exertion. No sooner, however, the desire to ascend the bright mountain of virtue is translated into action than, strong and formidable, rise in opposi-



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tion those passions continually lurking around the throne of reason. The native hue of resolution pales before the fascinating glare of the graceful panther, the deep roar of the haughty lion, and the hideous barking of the insatiable she-wolf—lust, pride, avarice. Frightened and disheartened the human soul is about to turn back from its intended purpose.

Dante, too, had almost abandoned the effort to continue his ascent, deeming it now impossible of actuation, when Vergil appeared to raise his drooping spirit, and whet the edge of his almost blunted purpose. The poet of imperial Rome, to whom the enthusiasm of the Middle Ages paid a cult of profound veneration, is chosen as the symbol of pure human reason, the incarnation of a true philosophy of ethics. The Roman encourages the Tuscan to be steadfast and persevering. The ascent must be made to avoid, in the future, the errors of the past. The animals disputing the pass are not to be feared, in very truth they are powerless, for whilst assailing the will, they cannot force its assent. Dante begins to introduce one, of the many, of his political ideas to which he was wedded, without in the least changing or altering the plan, and scope, and ultimate end of the poem. Passionately devoted to the imperialistic principles of the Ghibellines, he already prophesies, as the fulfillment of an ardently cherished desire, their victory over the Guelf party, symbolized in the chasing back to hell of the wolf by the hound—the mysterious Veltro.

Futile have been the attempts to make this allegorical allusion the base of a political theory affecting the whole

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of the Divine Comedy; a supposition resting on an entirely visionary foundation. In this first canto, Dante puts on the lips of Vergil the explanation of the mystic journey through the realms of sorrow, hope and love. The key to it is to be found in his letter to Cane Scaligero where he says: "The literal subject of the whole work is the state of the soul after death, simply considered. But, if the work be taken allegorically, the subject is man as by merit or demerit, through freedom of the will, he renders himself liable to the reward or punishment of justice." (XI. of the Epistolary.) Doubts about the genuineness of this letter have been gratuitously expressed by some, but no positive proof has ever been adduced to substantiate the assertion. Vergil states that he has been sent by Beatrice to lead him first through the regions of eternal woe, in order that, by seeing the penalty inflicted on sin, he may learn what a bitter and an evil thing it is to act against the dictates of reason and conscience. The "despairing shrieks of spirits who invoke a second death" will proclaim the gravity of an offence opposed to the very law of a rational being. Going then from the abode of perpetual to that of temporary pains, he will learn and realize how man, once fallen but repentant, ere passing from time into eternity, can be purified in fire, till the deeds done in the flesh having been burned and purged away, he will be found pure enough to approach the majesty of God.

To enter the Holy of Holies of the celestial Jerusalem another guide, worthier than he, will lead him,

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- ✓ Beatrice, the transubstantiation of Theology and Faith; for mere human reason symbolized by Vergil is incapable of fathoming the mysteries of that city where Love reigns supreme, and rewards virtue by the ecstasies of a never ending bliss.

"What reason here discovers, I have power  
To show thee; that which lies beyond, expect  
From Beatrice, faith, not reason's task."—  
Purg. XVIII. 44.

The argument of the Divine Comedy is fully developed here, and he that reads it by this light can ever hope to find the secret of its beauty and recondite meaning.

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### CHAPTER II.

To give the reader an idea of the difficulties of the subject on which he was about to enter, Dante expresses to Vergil grave doubts concerning his ability to accomplish the task. He is unworthy of imitating the example of Aeneas and St. Paul, for to them a noble mission had been assigned. The Trojan hero had been permitted to visit the Elysian Fields because he was to establish a mighty State, from whose seven-hilled Capital the Vicar of Christ would in the plenitude of time rule his Church—that Rome "wherein Christ dwells a Roman." Saul of Tarsus had been taken up to the third heaven that he might see and hear what mortal never before saw nor ever heard in order to bring back to earth the assurance of the Faith. How could he dare aspire to the privilege granted to a founder of empires and a vessel of election?

The Mantuan bids him to have courage; he, too, like Aeneas is chosen to spread a kingdom of righteousness, and as another Paul, to relate what he had seen in order that man may be persuaded to avoid evil and do good. ✓

"And to the mortal world when thou return'st, be this reported."—

Par. XXI. 86.

Verily, the undertaking would be arduous, nay, impossible if no special assistance were to complement and support the limitations of his frail nature. Of this

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- ✓ gracious and efficient aid he had already a sure pledge ;
- ✓ for he, Vergil, the symbol of Philosophy, stood by his side, sent as a guide by Theology, the fair Beatrice, who had been requested to succor him by illuminating
- ✓ Grace, the gentle Lucia. She in turn had executed the order of another—the nameless celestial woman, that
- ✓ as the type of Mercy, Predestination or preventive Grace, seeing from the white throne the dangers which surrounded Dante in the dark wood, had decreed the journey through the realms of immortal sorrow, hope and love.

- Convinced at last that the inspiration to write the apocalyptic song came from on high, realizing the impossibility of failure, and the certainty of overcoming all obstacles and difficulties, the poet flings away doubt. Nobly, daring now, he says to Virgil,

"Lead on."



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### CHAPTER III.

Drawing nigh to the entrance of hell, Dante hesitates again as above the fatal portals he read the words :

"Through me you pass into the city of woe,  
Through me you pass into eternal pain ;  
Through me among the people lost for aye.

.....  
All hope abandon ye who enter here."\*

The sound of loud cries, moans and lamentations also strikes terror into his heart. What if having taken the step he should never come back from that awful abode? Vergil kindly reassures him, and gently taking his hand, leads him in the vestibule of the eternal prison.

Here swarm the innumerable souls of those who spent their allotted term of years in an indifferent, aimless and useless manner, and having buried the talent entrusted to their keeping wasted away a precious existence ;—the craven, the coward, the undecided and the infirm of purpose. They share the gloom of the dark place with those angels who, when the standard of revolt was raised in heaven arrayed themselves neither on the side of Michael nor of Lucifer. Among these evil spirits, "both to God displeasing and to his foes,"

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\*NOTE.—All quotations are taken from Cary's translation of the Divine Comedy.

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Dante sees Esau, that for a mess of pottage sold his birthright to Jacob. Some are of the opinion that the person here alluded to is Pope Celestin V., who resigned the Papacy at the instigation of Boniface VIII., and probably they are right. The active and determined Tuscan could not have any sympathy for such a class of negative sinners lacking, alike, the boldness of vice and the courage of virtue. Disgust and supreme contempt must have dictated the words,

"Speak not of them, but look, and pass by."

Our poet demonstrates a profound knowledge of the very nature of sin in all its different categories and degrees of malice by apportioning to each of them a corresponding variety of adequate punishments, forged in and drawn from the fire of his glowing imagination. In the case of these shades, worthy neither of blame nor of praise, he relates having seen them standing entirely naked.\*

Their bodies and especially their faces are constantly stung by myriads of flies and hideous wasps. Black blood and purulent matter ooze out of that mass of corruption, which, commingling with the tears of the sufferers, drips to the ground, and becomes mixed with loathsome vermin. An appropriate expiation for an existence culpably sunk in sloth, moral torpor,

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\*Dramatic reasons induced Dante to represent the souls united to a fantastic clay, "With each sense, even to the sight, endued."—Purg. XXV. 99.

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and mental inactivity. Here for the first time we may imagine the seer crying out to us,

"Look, and think."

Vergil and his companion have now reached the shores of the Acheron, one of the infernal rivers. The first obstacle of the journey presents itself. The livid waters must be crossed, and the grim ferry-spirit refuses to carry over any living man, his duty and fiendish pleasure being to convey to the realms of darkness only the dead that in life "feared not God." The Roman, the type of human Reason, to be exercised by Dante, and by him led, having a privilege from above to contemplate, with the mind's eye, the place of punishment, forces Charon to obedience and compliance by intimating that

"So 'tis willed where will and power are one."

As the seared leaves driven by autumn's blasts, countless souls throng the shores restlessly yearning to be rushed over to the final doom. The sight of them imports a symbol shadowing forth a terrible truth. The vision of divine justice now clearly seen and apprehended by those spirits spurs them on more willingly and irresistibly to the merited punishment than once they hurried to the forbidden pleasures of sin.

The dread of suffering has become an ardent, urging, overmastering desire for it to souls entering eternity in

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\*Plato expresses the same idea when he argued that to do wrong, and not to suffer for it, is the greatest of evils.



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a state of rebellion against the omnipotent will.\* The realization of the tremendous fact appalled the pilgrim; the dark forest trembled and quaked; from the land of woe rose a mighty wind; a ruddish light flashed, and Dante swooned.

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### CHAPTER IV.

The poet roused by a thunder-clap finds himself on the other side of the Acheron in an abysmal vale dark and deep. This vale is supposed to be the Limbo, or Abraham's bosom, where rest the great poets, philosophers and lawgivers of antiquity together with a throng of illustrious men and women; children, too, are here.

The gratuitous bliss of the beatific vision of God, seen face to face in heaven, is denied them, because they died without baptism, a condition indispensable for the fruition of a gift not due to human nature. The author distinguishes two kinds of punishments endured in hell; the pain of sense, consisting in being confined either in extreme heat or in extreme cold, racked by additional torments; and the pain of loss engendered by the conscious thought of being deprived of the Supreme Good. The inhabitants of the first circle are free from physical pain; neither cries nor curses are to be heard here; only sighs gently wafted on the trembling air. Vergil tells his ward that shortly after his coming thither from the upper world, one crowned with majesty and splendor appeared and delivered the souls of the just. ✓

A flame was seen shining in the distance, whilst a unanimous chorus as if with one voice cried out those sublime words which, too late, Florence wrote on the monument of her greatest son, "Honor the loftiest Poet." The salutation came to Dante's companion from

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his fellow-poets, Homer, Horace, Ovid and Lucanus. These bards of Greece and Rome showed also respect to the future glory of Italy, and making him one of the party walked toward a castle surrounded by seven walls, and laved by the waves of a limpid stream. In that castle, emblematic of wisdom, the Tuscan found a galaxy of genius, talent and moral excellence whose central star was Aristotle, "the teacher of those who know"; Plato and Socrates, Caesar and Cicero, Camilla and Lavinia, Hector and Aeneas, and others, made an honored crown around the Stagirite. Their faces were neither glad nor sorrowful, and a certain peace seemed to breathe in those Elysian Fields.

The abiding faith of Dante in the doctrines of his Church is proved by the unqualified assent he gives to its teaching concerning baptism as a condition absolutely necessary for enjoying the beatific vision. The profoundest knowledge, prized by him as a jewel worthy all the treasures of earth, and the sublimest soaring of genius can not, as such, open the golden gates of a heaven not essentially due to man's nature and condition. Only the special gift of grace may raise the natural to the supernatural order. Could the singer of the Divine Comedy, adhering so tenaciously to a belief that in a certain sense ran counter to his dearest sympathies, be considered a rebel to the authority of that Church he loved so well, although, because of this very love and veneration, he, at times, raised the merciless scourge over, and pointed the finger of scorn at some of her unworthy ministers?

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### CHAPTER V.

Vergil and Dante have entered the second circle of the out-inferno, where the thick air vexed by a storm seemed to shiver in a darkness that could be felt. The poet by stating that each lower zone, as he descends, becomes narrower than the upper one, "embracing lesser space," expresses the salient idea of the various degrees of sin, and their corresponding punishment. "Much more of grief" is entailed by the contraction of space in a gradual process downward, till, adjusted almost with mathematical precision, from the minimum of pain endured in the first division nearest to heaven, the highest intensity of suffering is reached in the lowest pit furthest removed from God, where Lucifer is in the very center of the earth. ✓

In the second round are confined those that indulged in carnal sins, and defiled their bodies and souls with moral uncleanness. This offence heads the catalogue of incontinence, the other three circless of the first division being assigned to what Dante considers other species of the same generic vice. Aided by his fertile imagination and a deep insight into the very nature of things, the poet provides a very fitting punishment for the forbidden pleasures of the flesh. A tempestuous wind continually, without rest or respite, madly drives the sinners through the air, violently whirling them around, and furiously smiting them. The shades, thus ✓



## INTRODUCTION TO "DANTE'S INFERNO"

\* ✓ made the prey and cruel sport of the impetuous blasts, howl, moan, curse and blaspheme God.

How just and exact are the wages of a sin that subjects reason to the sway of lust. In the upper world these prevaricators wilfully shut their eyes to the light of the intellect; here darkness infolds them; they whose feet were always swift on the road of self-gratification are now restless and find no peace, for the storm wind eternally rushes them on and on. The unlawful pleasures of the flesh find a fearful counterpart in the pains inflicted by hell's torments. The Dantesque vision is magnificently and dismally grand.

Where is the rational being, man or woman, addicted to the breaking of a law based on the eternal fitness of things, that, abstracting from the forms of poetical conceptions, must not admit the justice of the Florentine's substantial views in the matter, and like unto him, leaving the dark valley of sin, strive to toil up the bright mountain of virtue, lest in a true sense he, or she may be brought to the sad realization that the powers divine "are just, and of our pleasant vices make instruments to plague us." It was written on a higher authority; "Wherewithal a man sinneth, by the same also shall he be punished."

At the entrance to this place, which properly speaking is the real first circle of the woeful city, Minos is made to sit in judgment over the souls that have crossed the waters of Acheron. Having known the nature of the offence, manifested by an open confession, he encircles himself with his tail as many times as will denote

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the degree of the circle in which he dooms the culprit to be cast.

Allegorically Minos represents conscience, which severe and not to be bribed, pronounces infallible judgment on human acts, and points out clearly the penalty of the transgression. Vergil here also overcomes the opposition and objections of the spirit to Dante's entering his abode, by the significant injunction,

"Hinder not his way . . . by destiny appointed"; adding the talismanic words,

"so 'tis willed

Where power and will are one."

Among a countless multitude of unclean shades stand out prominently Semiramis, Dido, Helena, Paris, Achilles and Tristan. Francesca da Rimini and Paolo engage for a moment the sympathy of the Tuscan; he seems even to mourn their fate; withal the sternness of his moral code could not but consign to the place of punishment the unfortunate lovers who in an ecstasy of passion had trampled on the majesty of the law, and died rebellious to it.

Art in its highest form has not been able to throw a halo of glory around the figures encircled by the darkness of the Divine Comedy. Poets and dramatists have failed to construct from this legend a work of aesthetic beauty. Foscolo wrote to his friend Silvio Pellico, when he heard that he intended to write a tragedy on Francesca; "Leave the dead of Dante alone; they only frighten the living."

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### CHAPTER VI.

Descending to the third circle, they found it set apart for the gluttons, who in a too refined fashion, and beyond the limits of moderation had given themselves up to the pleasures of the table, the delights of the palate, and by abusing what was meant for use had perverted the means into an end. The retribution meted out to such gross sensuality is fearful, and, as usual, apposite. The gluttons are lying naked in a mass of soft and filthy mud, whilst a continuous fall of discolored water, and sleet, and snow flagellates their bodies. Tormented and scourged by the storm, the wretches howl like dogs, and painfully roll on one side to screen the other. The never ceasing rain, the stench, and the putrid slime must needs remind them bitterly of the sparkling cup, the exquisite savor, and delicate odors that once intoxicated their senses. The myriads of lights that turned their nights into days contrast strongly with the pall of darkness now enveloping them. The three-mouthed monster, Cerberus, the type of gluttony, assails their ears with a bark deep and hoarse far different from the soft strains of music floating in the scented air of festive halls. Feeding

"Upon the emptiness that substance seemed,"  
this infernal dog ferociously tears their limbs.

Dante recognizes his fellow citizen, Ciacco, and they hold discourse about the many evils afflicting Florence,



## INTRODUCTION TO "DANTE'S INFERNO"

the jealousy, envy, pride, and avarice kindling unholy flames in the hearts of her children; the bitter strifes of party factions, the cruelty of the triumphant Neri, and the Nemesis of the Bianchi, who persecute in their turn and make the land desolate.

Leaving him to sink and rise no more till "the last angel trumpet" will wake the echoes of the regions of the dead, the poets pass on with tardy steps conversing on the Resurrection of the body. Lofty theme treated by Dante, in the few concluding lines of this canto, with the dialectic precision of a philosopher, and the luminous accuracy of a theologian.

Taking for granted the fact that at the last judgment man will "resume his fleshy vesture and his form," he asks Vergil if an increase of torment will follow from the new condition. For an answer, he is referred to philosophy, which teaches that the capacity for suffering in man develops in proportion as he attains to the given perfection of his being. Unlike the angels, it is in the union of spirit and matter that he finds the completion of his mode of existence.

"Though ne'er to true perfection may arrive  
This race accurst, yet nearer then, than now,  
They shall approach it."

The eternity of the pains of hell ever recurs in the pages of the epic; and yet on the portals of this city of despair, Dante had read;—

"Justice the founder of my fabric moved:  
To rear me was the task of *power* divine,



## INTRODUCTION TO "DANTE'S INFERNO"

Supremest *wisdom*, and primeval *love*.

Before me things create were none, save things  
Eternal, and eternal I endure."

It is written in the book of Job that the prodigy of creation was hailed at the dawn of time with the song of the stars, the children of God rejoicing in the music of the spheres. When the final twilight will usher in the silences of eternity, that canticle will fulfill itself in the justice, and in the power, and in the wisdom, and in the love of the Creator. The harmony of that great symphonic poem of human life will not be marred by the cry of resigned despair at the thought of eternal separation from the Infinite Good. That "depart from me," proclaiming the triumph of justice, will not conflict with the attribute of love, for the accursed, profoundly convinced of the righteousness of the sentence, will be forced to realize that even in hell it is mitigated by the gentle rain of mercy. Man, having passed from time into eternity in a state of rebellion to God, because hopelessly and obstinately unrepentant, deserves, and merits, and brings upon himself a punishment infinite in duration and intensity.

"He hath in sooth good cause for endless grief,  
Who, for the love of thing that lasteth not,  
Despoils himself forever of that love."—Par. XV. 8.

But the mercy of heaven so tempers justice, as to make commensurate with the offence, only the continuance of the penalty, and not its character.

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### CHAPTER VII.

In their descent to the fourth circle, a third obstacle bars the way. Pluto, the god of hell, and symbol of avarice, fearing lest one yet in the flesh by entering and seeing his abode should be led to reform his life, calls for the help of Satan. Vergil reproaches him. "Not without cause" does Dante go "through the dark profound"; a noble end inspires his task, and it will be accomplished, "for so 'tis willed on high"—and they proceed.

Here, in a far greater number than elsewhere, are committed those who hoarded wealth, or lavishly squandered it—the extreme deviations from one and the same virtue. The avaricious and the prodigal are confined in a broad circular cavern divided in the middle by a line: the prodigal from the furthest point at the right of it, and the avaricious from the left, advance rolling with breast and shoulders heavy round stones, that each opponent hurls at the other. Having reached the center, they, like the roaring waves of Scylla and Charybdis so furiously strike each other that the force of the shock turns them back to their former station, howling always, and hoarsely shouting, the prodigals, "Why holdest thou fast?," the avaricious, "Why castest thou away?"; then the infernal brawl begins again, and goes on and on, without pause or intermission, ever. The fitness of the punishment is evident. The avarici-

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ous, in the ceaseless effort to amass wealth and acquire more, undergoes many a trial, counting as nothing infinite toil and privations. Care is the inseparable companion of his miserable life; like a heavy stone he bears it wherever he goes, groaning under its weight, but always fearful of losing it. The prodigal, on the contrary, thoughtlessly throws away in a lavish and extravagant manner what providence gave to his keeping. In financial straits, perhaps, he repairs to the money lender, the avaricious, and whilst sincerely hating, hypocritically fawns upon him, to procure the means of gratifying his inclinations.

At the first opportunity, however, he is ready to effect his ruin, and no occasion is permitted to pass without holding the extortioner up to the execration of society. They detest each other heartily, even when not borrowing and lending, but a prevailing passion brings them together on the dividing line of the fourth circle of hell, for mutual injury, abuse, and recrimination. The Florentine here describes the customs, manners, and ideas of his age.

The fate of those wretches gave rise to a conversation concerning the vanity of earthly goods, introducing certain opinions touching the influence of Fortune on the affairs of man.

Leaving the fourth, they descend to the fifth circle and walk along the banks of the Styx, the second river of hell. Heretofore Dante set forth the special punishment of sins of a sensual nature—impurity, gluttony, prodigality, avarice; here, he begins to treat of trans-



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gressions of a more spiritual nature enrooted in the will. The boiling waters of the Stygian pool are black, sluggish, and densely muddy. In that liquid mire, move and live the wrathful. Almost glued in the marshy swamp, they blindly strike with head, hands, and feet, tearing the flesh with their teeth, vainly striving to give vent to a fury that maddens them. This impulse ever urging, and never fulfilled, is a fitting punishment for a rational being that had not the moral strength to curb the uprising of a prepotent passion. Once quick to wrath, they are now held fast in a thick mire where they jostle their naked bodies, ineffectually struggling to quench the devouring thirst on uncontrollable rage.

Below the seething mass, are sunk the sullen, at the bottom of the Styx. These sinners had also allowed the smouldering fire of wrath to burst into a flame inwardly, but gave to it no outward expression. Equally guilty of not repressing the promptings of a like animal instinct, in a sulky mood, they fostered and nourished it silently in the secret recesses of the soul. Therefore, they share the same penalty aggravated by being entirely submerged in the pool. The intensity of the pain forces sighs from their lips, which, rising to the surface, part the waters in many bubbles, and out of them, as coming from gurgling throats, issue lamentable sounds of woe and sorrow.

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### CHAPTER VIII.

This portion of the mystic song, masterly woven out of the fancy of the poet, is deep in singificance, and obscure in language. Obstacles and impediments are represented as becoming greater and greater with the progress of the journey through the realms of the dead. Such declaration imports a symbol ingeniously conceived to express a twofold truth; the serious difficulties of a further treatment of the subject; and the efforts made, subjectively on the part of the individual human passions, and objectively on the part of the spirit of darkness, to draw the mind from the salutary contemplation of the just retribution of sin. To convey the lesson, veiled in an allegory in which the real and the ideal are most significantly blended, Dante gives to hell the form of a colossal city sloping downward to the center of the earth, in the shape of an inverted cone. It is supposed to be partitioned off in four principal sections containing nine circles, each section protected against the trespass of mortals by frowning barriers. The poet, aided by Vergil, has already seen the horrors of the first division.

Those who had merely sinned through frailty and incontinence are confined in the first part, which, properly speaking, lies outside the limits of the walled city—the *Inferno Murato*. The sins herein punished, being relatively less grave, the obstacles are not so great,

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albeit Charon, Cerberus, Minos and Pluto sufficiently resist the venturous intruder. In the third and fourth divisions, are shut up in narrower circles and a frightful pit those prevaricators, who by the refinement of fraud, having almost attained the perfection of evil, justly deserve the most cruel torments. The obstacles here are apparently insurmountable and the opposition most determined, the watch being kept by monsters and giants.

We are now before the second division of the city "that of Dis is named," the veritable walled hell, enclosing multitudes of various transgressors of the law. Their sins are greater than those expiated in the first part, because they are inspired by, and conceived through, malice and violence. The penalty is accordingly more severe and the access more stubbornly contested.

Dante, from the shores of the Styx, sees two flames leaping up at intervals from the tower set over the city of Dis. They are signals of approaching danger. With the speed of an arrow, a little vessel darts in the direction of the poets manned by Phlegyas, who, once the King of the Lapithæ, having in a paroxysm of passion set fire to the temple of Apollo, endures in that place the penalty of the wrathful. On a command imperiously delivered, he submits to ferry them across the marsh. Whilst in the middle of it, the shade of an arrogant Florentine, Argenti, emerging from the black waters, tries to bandy words with his countryman. To demonstrate that the truly wise should disregard the senselessly proud, he spurns the culprit, and the imper-



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sonation of Philosophy embraces him, and, for the noble deed, calls her blessed in whom he was conceived.

From the eternal fire that burns within, the walls of the city appear flamingly red. On landing, the trembling pilgrim notices myriads of fallen angels swarming about the fatal portals. Vergil alone goes upon to them: the malignant spirits angrily refuse to allow any one to enter, and bar the gates against them. The faithful guide returns to his ward somewhat downcast and disappointed; withal, he utters words of encouragement and hope, and remarks that their insolence is not new, for, at a less secret pass, they had before offered a vain resistance to Christ himself.

Dante and Vergil remain thus standing powerless before the well fortified city. The mystic allusion, as it has been pointed out above, refers to the insurmountable difficulties and impotence of human reason to properly describe the malice of sin, and the condign punishment due to it, without the assistance of supernatural aid and divine grace.

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### CHAPTER IX.

Dante begins now to doubt whether any one in the flesh could ever explore the bourne of that rueful country, or, once entered, find a path out of it. To be relieved from the oppressive suspense, and with the view to learn if even the messenger sent by Beatrice could be equal to the task of treading that dark labyrinth, he propounds the question. The Roman answers that not long after his death he had been conjured up by the mighty power of a Thessalonian sorceress, and made to go down to the lowest pit to bring up from the circle of Judas the spirit of a soldier named Sextus. It was plain now that his companion knew full well the way and the journey was possible if a superior agency would but interpose. Yet, could he, without having tasted death, follow the lead and see the immortality of sorrow, and having seen, return and tell his brethren? Furthermore, had not the Saviour said that it was sufficient for mortals to have the law and the prophets for their guide in life?

Suddenly the summit of the fiery tower became more awfully horrible by the appearance of the three Furies, the Eumenides of the Greeks, hideous and appalling as Hellenic fiction has made them. The hags shriek, threaten and employ every means to terrify Dante, alarmed lest he should be bold enough to enter and see things to frighten him and others from evil ways. The



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indiscriminate use of mythological and Christian events, of legendary Furies and biblical Angels is freely made by the author, according to the prevailing custom of his age, to bring out in fuller relief the importance of a leading thought and illustrate its meaning. Sin will continue to make the earth desolate with desolation as long as the mind is prevented, by internal or external influences, from meditating and reflecting on the retribution due to it. The meaning of the allegory deepens at every line. The poet himself clearly intimates it.

"Ye of intellect

Sound and entire, mark well the lore conceal'd  
Under close texture of the mystic strain."

Was the very diminutive array of a class of commentators shown in a prophetic vision to the great Tuscan, when he wrote,—“Ye of intellect sound and entire?”

The Furies vanish;—a mighty sound is heard as if of a whirling wind, and on came one walking, dry shod, over the perturbed waves, countless souls flying before his face. It was Mercury. Full of scorn, he went up to the barred gates; touched them with a magic wand, and they flew open. Then with disdain he did harshly revile the outcasts of heaven:

“Whence doth this wild excess of insolence

Lodge in you? Wherefore kick you 'gainst that will  
Ne'er frustrate of its end?”

Having uttered these words he disappeared as mysteriously as he had come. Under this allegorical per-

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son, is transparently veiled a double meaning. He was worshipped of yore as a god, principally possessing the attributes of eloquence and strength, and of these the human mind stands most in need to penetrate the regions symbolically visited by Dante. The blending of the human and the divine, of the natural and the supernatural finds a perfect synthesis in Mercury. It was the object of the writer of the Divine Comedy to make man mend his ways by presenting the truths of revelation in symbols borrowed from classic legend.

The iron gates are opened; and the poets cross the threshold of the fatal city. A vast tract, of irregular and broken ground, resembling a large graveyard, lies around the walls. It is covered with sepulchers which, by circumambient flames, are more intensely heated, than, by art, is iron bent into form. The lids were lifted up and hung in mid air; from the fiery tombs issued such dire lamentations as testified to the extent of torments endured within. The heresiarchs of every sect and their followers were interred in those vaults,

"Like with like."

## INTRODUCTION TO "DANTE'S INFERNO"

### CHAPTER X.

The poets strike a secret path running among the sepulchers tenanted by heresy, taken in the widest acception of the word. Vergil intimates that after the general Resurrection those tombs would be forever closed. They notice the burial place of Epicurus and his disciples who,

"With the body made the spirit die."

X One of them is Farinata, a proud Ghibelline, holding up his head in scorn even in hell. It is worthy of notice that Dante's views and opinions, so tenaciously held and fiercely maintained, do not hinder him in the least from placing indiscriminately in the abode of eternal perdition Guelf and Ghibelline. This fact proves how wide of the mark some commentators, or so-called scholars, go when, blinded by prejudice, or chattering through very ignorance, they attempt to assign a political motive to the Divine Comedy.

The nature of the punishment of the Epicureans is cleverly devised. Having formerly concerned themselves exclusively with the interests, pleasures and business of the present, they denied the existence of a future state. The refrain of their song is heard yet in the world, "Let us eat and drink, for, behold, to-morrow we die." The skeleton crowned with roses looks down still from the place of honor upon many a revel drawn out in the antelucan hours of the night. By a fitting

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retribution, they are now deprived of the faculty of seizing upon the actual present, and, like unto those that have bad light, see only dimly what happens in the distant future. The moment, however, the future becomes present they immediately fail to apprehend it, so that

"When on futurity the portals close"

all knowledge whatsoever and all perception, save that of suffering, will be lost.

Among the felons of these fiery prisons, are Uberti, Cavalcante, Frederick II., the grandson of Barbarossa, and the Cardinal Ottaviano degli Ubaldini, another Ghibelline, who, 'tis said, would have exchanged his soul, if there were such a thing, for the triumph of his party.



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### CHAPTER XI.

The poets tread their way to a great valley from which exhaled pestilential vapors. To become gradually accustomed to the noisome smell they pause in conversation behind a monument whereon the words are inscribed ;

"I have in charge  
Pope Anastasius, whom Photinus drew  
From the right path."

Here Dante, following a doubtful chronicle attributed to Martinus Polonus, unwittingly allowed himself to be drawn from the right way of historical truth. The Anastasius, whom the heretical teachings of Photinus concerning the divinity of Christ led astray, is the Greek Emperor and not the Roman Pontiff of the same name. Every student, even slightly acquainted with ecclesiastical annals, knows that this Pope, on the contrary, offered the most determined opposition to the errors of the East, and is justly celebrated as the champion of the Faith.

The tarrying is made the occasion for a detailed description of the infernal regions as conceived by the Tuscan, forming, as it were, an index to this poem. The Dantesque Hell has four great, principal divisions subdivided into nine circles set apart for the punishment of various categories of sin. In the first division, al-

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ready visited, under the generic term of incontinence, are expiated personal offences exclusively related to the individual. Vergil, the symbol of Reason, discourses about sin, its nature, its greater or less deformity, as a violation of the law.

The prevaricator may be guilty of injustice such as to deserve the retribution meted out in the six circles of the first division. Our poet seems to consider those sins entirely personal, enrooted mainly in sensuality, and having for their end only the individual. But a moral code regulates also the relations of man to man, and in this respect there may be offences that trench upon the rights of God, and his creatures.

Wrong may be done to others either through violence or fraud. Fraud, being, by its nature, a worse sin than violence, the progressive penalty attached thereunto so varies according to the different degrees of the offence, as to finally develop the torturing pangs and anguish of the Satanic pit, where, in the lowest depths, treason mourns the eternal curse.

The three rounds of the second division, now about to be entered, hold those malefactors who, by violence in diverse ways, wrought injury to their fellow-beings—highway robbers, blood-thirsty tyrants, and princes; destroyers of themselves, or of their goods which leads to the suicidal act; criminals against God, God's Nature, and its Art. In this canto Dante expresses the noblest conception of art with a most appropriate figure of speech.

Feigning not to comprehend that usury offended

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Divine Goodness, he puts on the lips of Vergil an answer that forms one of the most precious gems of the poem.

"Philosophy, to an attentive ear,  
Clearly points out, not in one part alone,  
How imitative Nature takes her course  
From the celestial mind, and from its art :  
And where her laws the Stagirite unfolds,  
Not many leaves scann'd o'er, observing well  
Thou shalt discover, that *your art on her* .  
*Obsequious* follows, as the learner treads  
In his instructor's step : so that *your art*  
*Deserves the name of second in descent*  
*From God.*"

We have here the presentment of a truth intuitively grasped by the eagle mind of the theologian, philosopher, and seer. God, the supreme Architect, breaking the silence of eternity, calls the world of spirit and matter into existence from the abysmal night of nothingness, by a simple act of his powerful will. Not as an emanation from his essence, but as an effect of his omnipotence, he shapes and moulds it according to the archetype of his thought, eternal, substantial, infinite, which is the essential reason of beauty, the pattern of grace, the measure of symmetry, the diapason of harmony and the source of all possible perfections in the moral and physical order. Nature then takes its course from the celestial mind and its art. Man created to the image and likeness of his Maker, will only act in conformity to the law of his being when he, though im-



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perfectly, conforms his to the divine action, imitating it. Nature being the child of God, when man "follows Nature as the disciple does the master," art becomes, as it were, grandchild of God. Sublime conception worthy the pilgrim of the Infinite!

The eye of genius alone can see in every burning bush the vision of the Divine. From Plato to Michelangelo, from Aristotle to Raphael, all thinkers and artists have felt that true art must seize upon the eternal idea illuminating created things. The indescribable pleasure, the tumultuous delight with which we are filled and thrilled at the sight of a masterpiece of beauty is due to a recognition of something vibrating within ourselves, a type of the perfect enshrined in the sanctuary of the soul. It partakes of the character of a recollection but dimly awakened like the echo of soft music heard in a dream.

This is mysticism; and Dante is nothing if not a mystic; and he drew copious draughts from the mystic fountain of St. Bonaventure's works;\* and the true lovers of art are now most potently striving to find again those forms which unfolded their radiant beauty in the mystic light of the Ages of Faith.

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\*Itinerarium Mentis in Deum. Reductio omnium Artium ad Theologiam.



## INTRODUCTION TO "DANTE'S INFERNO"

### CHAPTER XII.

The journey is resumed in the direction of the second division in whose rounds are confined those whose perverted wills did violence to others, themselves, and God. In order to enter the dreadful circle they had to pass through a gorge strewn with rocks, as wild and dangerous as a pass cut in the Alps by the trembling of the earth or by the falling of a mountain. The Florentine, being lost in wonder at the sight, Vergil informs him that the place was not in such frightful condition when he passed through it before. The change had been brought on by the earthquake which shook hell as the Saviour came,

"Who carried off from Dis the mighty spoil  
Of the highest circle. . . ."  
—the Limbo of the just.

The entrance to the ravine was guarded by the fabled Minotaur of Crete, the charge having been assigned to this unnatural son of Pasiphæe, because Greek legend made him the avenger of the Athenians' crime against Androgenes. The reader must bear in mind that mythological and historical personages are put in various parts of the dolorous city as types of certain sins, both as the object of punishment, and the scourge of justice.

Safely passing by the brutish watch, they approach the first round of the circle where tyrants, cruel princes,

## INTRODUCTION TO "DANTE'S INFERNO"

and marauders are plunged in a river of boiling blood. Some are so deeply immersed that the seething liquid comes up to their throats, whilst others stand above it breast high. Centaurs armed with bows and arrows run single file on the banks ready to transfix any sinner bold enough to lift himself up beyond the fated mark. These Centaurs firmly contest the way to the strange visitors. As usual, Vergil overcomes the opposition. How could so privileged a mortal be prevented from going through the regions of the dead when a fair woman had absented herself from heaven awhile to entrust the favorite to his care? It was so appointed "where will and power are one"; "necessity" led the seer, and not "delight." The dominant note of the theme runs through the grand harmony of the poem. The fulfillment of the law is blessedness; violation, which is sin, misery; and the sight of misery will cause righteousness to be loved; iniquity, hated.

Led by one of the Centaurs, now obedient to the supreme mandate, Dante sees, suffering in the crimson river, Alexander the Great, Dionysius of Syracuse, Ezzelino, the son-in-law of Frederick II., Attila, and a host of others, who had steeped their hands deep in human blood. The poetic fitness of the penalty is evident.

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### CHAPTER XIII.

The second round of the circle is reached: it is a sandy pathless wood resonant with deep and heavy sighs. The stunted trees put forth leaves of a dusky color; their knotted branches spread and become matted in a mass of entangled growth; they bear no fruit, but poisonous thorns. The unclean Harpies feed upon, and make their nests in them.

Two classes of sinners are punished here; those who did violence to themselves by taking their own lives; and those who by squandering their goods came to an untimely death. The moment, the suicide has consummated the deed, his soul is hurled to this gloomy forest, and is instantly transformed into a tree. The poetical fiction of the punishment is appropriate and well devised. Having criminally dissolved a heaven-appointed partnership before the time set by the Supreme Arbiter, the culprit is forced into another union that, eternally, will torment and degrade him. The fatal tree has a life as unnatural as the act committed; it grows in a trackless wood to signify that no possible reason could be assigned, or a way found to explain the motive of the self-murderer.

Availing himself of the license which Horace indulges to poets, the Tuscan bard pushes the figment so far as to assert, that the souls of these sinners will never again be reunited to their bodies. After the



## INTRODUCTION TO "DANTE'S INFERNO"

general Resurrection, they will drag them with ropes to the very spot where the trees stand, and from them they will hang for evermore.

To have a palpable proof of the reality of so astounding a punishment, Dante breaks off a branch from a gnarled trunk: at once, blood trickles from it, and the plaint issues forth, "Why pluck'st thou me?" It is the voice of Piero delle Vigne, the secretary of the Emperor Frederick II.

Different, is the retribution meted out to that class of sinners who by madly throwing away their wealth and goods, came to an untimely and violent death. Fast and furiously, they are doomed to run in the infernal forest closely pursued by female mastiffs lean and hungry. When these wretches become entangled in the matted branches, the dogs bury their fangs in the quivering flesh, and tear them to pieces. Reflecting the customs of his day, the exile from the city of the Medici, symbolized in the pursuing animals the impatient creditors of the spentrifts, perpetually hunting their victims, following their tracks day and night, and never giving them rest. An offence, to all appearances, of the same nature is punished in the fourth circle of the first division, where, as we have seen, the prodigals are confined. The reason of the difference, in respect to the penalty, is to be found in the motive. Dante thinks that those sinned through sensuality; these, through intellectual malice.

Among the many included in the second category of suicides, are Lano of Siena, who having squandered all



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he had, permitted himself to be killed to escape a life of penury and shame, and Giacomo of Padua guilty of the most extravagant prodigality, such as setting his magnificent house on fire in order to enjoy the sight of a fine conflagration; he, too, ended in a sudden death.

## INTRODUCTION TO "DANTE'S INFERNO"

### CHAPTER XIV.

The poets are supposed to be nearing the limits of the third round, where heaven's justice does, by terrible chastisements, vindicate the outraged rights of the Creator, of Nature, and its Art. The somber wood of the self-murderers encompasses a vast, dreary desert of burning sand kept constantly in a state of unbearable heat by fire, slowly and silently falling, in dilated flakes like snow on Alpine heights. Here the blasphemers of God are lying supine on the glowing sand with their naked bodies fearfully parched and scorched; the violent offenders against Nature are crouching about in groups, likewise tormented; the perverters of its Art move incessantly around—all wailing, moaning, weeping in a most piteous manner. The sight so harrows Dante's compassionate soul, that he cries out;

"Vengeance of heaven! Oh! how shouldst thou  
be feared

By all, who read what here mine eyes beheld."

The character of the extraordinary punishment is imagined in order to convey an idea of the enormity of a sin exceeding all the bounds of nature, fanned by the fiercest breath of a most unnatural lust, and alike barren and unproductive as the sandy waste of the accursed desert. In this canto, only the prevaricators against the majesty of God are considered. Among

## INTRODUCTION TO "DANTE'S INFERNO"

them, the poet notices a blasphemer enduring the relentless rack seemingly unheeding it, another Prometheus, proud, scornful, and defiant. It is Capenus, who because of his impiety against Jupiter, on the walls of Thebes was shattered by the bolt of the god. In hell, the sacrilegious wretch still continues to vent his ire against a supreme power, uttering the challenging "*No*," and the very utterance becomes for him a cause of more pain and anguish.

Carefully walking along a path skirting the burning sand, Vergil and his ward come to a spot where a rivulet, boiling and red, issues from the wood. It is the Phlegeton, the third of the infernal rivers.

To explain the origin of these streams, which are in reality one and the same river under different names, the poet goes back to the golden age, when, according to mythological fables, the world enjoyed happiness, peace, and justice under the rule of Saturn, who reigned in the island of Crete. Centuries upon centuries have elapsed, and a man as ancient as humanity stands with his back turned to Egypt within a mountain of that island called Ida. This breathing colossus is fashioned after the pattern of the statue seen in a dream by Nabuchodonozor; the head is wrought of pure gold; the arms and breast are of silver; the middle of the trunk is of brass; the rest is of fine iron, save the right foot which is of clay, and it leans more firmly on the left. Except the head, a rent runs through that huge body, whence tears distill in a continuous flow to the earth, and penetrating its surface go to make the four rivers

## INTRODUCTION TO "DANTE'S INFERNO"

of hell, the Acheron, the Styx, the Phlegeton, and the Cocytus. The statue is a symbol of humanity resting on the double base of Empire and Church, but, more firmly on the latter. The various parts represent the historic succession of the ages of Gold, Silver, Bronze, and Iron. The back of it is turned to Egypt emblematic of the past; the face towards Rome, the seat of spiritual and temporal kingdoms, Church and State, as conceived by the author of "De Monarchia." It is the concrete abstract of humanity pierced, and cleaved, and riven by the folly, and the vices, and the sins of man. The head only is not cleft; it is the type of an age of blessedness such as the Tuscan believed possible under a universal monarchy. From the fissure, issue torrents of tears; on earth, these tears sadden the heart of man; beyond the grave, they are the sources of the pains of hell.

It may seem strange, that in a pre-eminently Christian poem, mythological personages and pagan fables should be so freely used. The explanation is within easy reach, and the apparent incongruity serves to bring out more clearly the religious spirit permeating it. Dante felt that everything true, good, and beautiful could be enlisted in the service of religion, and made to do homage to it. One of the scholars best versed in Dantesque literature, the Duke of Sermoneta, rightly argues that to understand the Divine Comedy it is absolutely necessary to know the history of the times when the poem was written, also, those preceding it. It would be a monotonous repetition to say that this ori-



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ginal genius focused and reflected in his mind all that was actually knowable in his day. If the simile be permitted, he may be compared to a sponge absorbing the intellectual tendency of the environment; the aspirations, yearnings, sympathies, beliefs, and modes of reasoning of the ambient in which he lived; the scholastic poet was ever quick to see, and apt to interpret the currents of thought which had run in channels centuries deep. Literature and the arts, such as the monks saved from destruction, had come down as the flowering of Polytheism, the product of its spirit and civilization.

The speculative sciences, valued so much in the Middle Ages, had been, in the main, introduced by the Arabs, either as their original productions, or as translations from the Greek, in order to undermine, oppose and discredit the teachings of Christianity. It became therefore incumbent on the champions and defenders of this religion to demonstrate that there was no antagonism between science and revelation. At the time of the Renaissance a false Humanism strove to prove the incompatibility between the austere dogma of Palestine and the highest artistic and philosophic thought of Greece. Poets, scholars and artists made clear by their works the fallacy of the argument. Centuries after Dante, a similar condition obtained in France. Voltaire had said, "Christianity is ridiculous": Chateaubriand answered, "Christianity is sublime." Madame de Staël hymned to the "Genius of Humanity:"

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Chateaubriand sang the peans of the "Genius of Christianity."

Convinced that whatever is true, good and beautiful is and must be in harmony with the doctrines of the Incarnate Word,—the source, and the cause, and the archetype of truth, goodness and beauty, Dante planned and built the outward form of the Divine Comedy. In the rearing of this masterly edifice, intended as an object lesson to teach man, that in avoiding evil and doing good he can find happiness temporal and eternal, he drew largely and liberally from the treasure house of classic lore. To lend additional proof to a truth, to illustrate a theory, to confirm the righteousness of a moral law, he did not hesitate to use the forms in which Roman or Greek had clothed his dreams of the divine. To every sacred event or person taken from biblical or traditional testimony, he places side by side an equivalent woven from Hellas' exquisite fancy, or from Rome's more earnest fiction. To the starless darkness of a Christian hell, he opposes the Tartarean abodes of the realms of Pluto. Vergil, the disciple of Homer, is his guide, and Mercury preforms the office of a ministering angel. Not only scholastic philosophy and theology, but literature and art must also be the acolytes of the Bride of Christ.

Never a better and more successful effort was made to prove that culture is compatible with religion. Study and observation had persuaded Dante that legends and myths are but facts transfigured by the idea; that in the aesthetic theology of Olympus, some

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grains of gold might be found hidden in the mass of revolting aberrations and gross errors,—fragments of an integral system of truth revealed in Eden in all its purity, preserved by the chosen people of Israel, distorted, perverted and corrupted by the Nations.

Eusebius Pamphilius in his "Evangelical Preparation" pioneered the path to new fields of investigation on the subject of comparative religion, yielding then conclusions totally different from those in vogue at the present day.

Christianity did not borrow, did not inherit its tenets from the Nations—these strayed away from the light, and groped in darkness. It existed in Eden, as the great Augustine observed, and after him Bossuet: it marched through the centuries with the Hebrews carrying with them the sacred records: it continues and will continue to exist to the end and consummation of time under the name of Him who came to seal in the new, the covenant of the old dispensation: whatever truth is to be found outside of this religion, comes from it: whatever is false, is the fiction of the human mind. Christianity has not inherited, has not adopted, has not transformed, has not introduced anything essential in its system of doctrine and code of morality. It stands without an equal in the world, and its existence is coeval with time.

This thought burned in the mind of Dante, and his genius, spurning with a Seraph's loathing the baser matter of Olympian superstition, seized the gold to

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adorn an epic poem embracing in its catholicity earth and heaven, hell and purgatory, time and eternity, sin and virtue, punishment and reward, repentance and purification,—man, angels and God.



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### CHAPTER XV.

Continuing the pilgrimage, the poets meet a troop of spirits walking without pause, without rest in the burning sand, striving to shake off the fiery flakes from their bodies parched beyond recognition. Should they stop but a single moment, they would be struck down on the spot, and there left to lie for a hundred years, deprived even of the poor relief of parrying the fire when it "smites sorest."

These are the nefarious sinners who having imitated the Sodomites in their most unnatural crimes, done in wanton violence to Nature, bear their accursed name. Violent heat now scorches bodies once burning with the flames of lust, and of the torment there shall be no end.

Dante does not hesitate to associate with that loathsome herd his former teacher, Brunetto Latini, whose vast knowledge and brilliant parts he held in the highest admiration. A cry of anguish seems to run like an undertone through the measures of his verse, that the possession of talents had not saved the distinguished Florentine from the commission of abominable deeds. Pursuant to the wishes of the unfortunate master, he walks reverently by his side conversing on the calamities of the fair city on the banks of the Arno, and the reason of the journey through the realms of the dead. The subject and tone of the conversation, the allusions

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and the remarks made, give occasion for teaching a lesson far-reaching in importance and meaning.

A mind rendered flexible by study and richly stored with information does not insure immunity from temptation, nor is it a factor in overcoming it. Another faculty must be educated, and this is conscience, from whose deliberations, right conduct follows. Byron very appropriately said; "The tree of knowledge is not the tree of life." The harmonious development of heart and mind enables the soul to keep afloat in a stream of tendency that makes for righteousness, thus fulfilling the law of its being.

An old cult in a new form has been preached in modern times; its name is culture, taking the word in its widest acceptance. Like the ancient Greeks, the apostles of this religion substitute taste for conscience; they confound the beautiful with the good, and promulgate a doctrine of light and sweetness. Of sin, as such, they have no consciousness, and when counseling the propriety of avoiding it, they do so in a Petronian spirit, not because it offends any moral law, but because it is gross and vulgar. For an æsthetic mind, sin artistically considered, is not in good taste.

It does not take a seer to read the handwriting on the wall to declare that this neo-hellenism has been tried and found wanting. A prophet of culturism has, with a tinge of sadness, said of its votaries that "they have failed in morality, and morality is indispensable."\*

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\*Matthew Arnold.

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✓ Dante does not mince matters. In this circle he places with the admired, and, in a certain sense, revered teacher,

"Men of great learning and no less renown."

✓ The poet, most assuredly, could not be charged with being an enemy of learning; much less, with the conviction that it was incompatible with religion. His contention was, that learning is, in itself, incompetent, powerless to lead man to the attainment of his ultimate end—the perfection of his being. Right thinking and right doing are essential for the completeness of human life. So deep was his love of moral excellence, that Dante spared no one who, from the beauty of a cultured mind, had divorced the virtue of the heart. In this regard, he was no respecter of persons, and the eternally rushing rivers of hell, could not wash the stains from a guilty conscience.



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### CHAPTER XVI.

Another troop of spirits, moving on under the tormenting rain of fire, draws near the poets. They are tainted with the same execrable sin of Sodoma. There are some amongst them of high estate, distinguished for wisdom and prowess, Florentines all, Guerra, Aldobrandi, and Rusticucci. The latter complains that the savage temper of a wife was in great measure responsible for his being in that dreadful place. At this juncture, is heard the deafening roar of the Plegeton falling in the chasm below. Vergil requests Dante to give him the cord with which he was girded, and having received it "gathered up and coiled" cast it in the yawning abyss. The original Italian text favors the reading of the lines 110 and 111 in the sense that the girdle was thrown by the Roman so as to retain one end of it in his hand. Forthwith, a most singular form loomed up in the twilight swimming and creeping up to them. It was the monster, Geryon, who was to carry them to the next circle where Fraud is punished.

Much has been written, many opinions have been held, suppositions made, hypotheses advanced, and theories fabricated, to explain the recondite meaning of this cord. Ancient commentators, who flourished in the fifteenth century, maintain that the cincture must be taken as a type of certain faults committed by Dante, ere Reason sent by Grace had rescued him from the dark



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wood of sin. It is delivered "gathered up and coiled" emblematic of the deceit employed by him for the successful consummation of unrighteous deeds.

In the XXX Canto, Vers. 132, of Purgatory, Beatrice says of him:—

"His steps were turned into deceitful ways,  
Following false images of good, that make  
No promise perfect. Nor availed me aught  
To sue for inspirations, with the which,  
I, both in dreams of night, and otherwise,  
Did call him back; of them so little recked him.  
Such depth he fell, that all device was short  
Of his preserving, save that he should view  
The children of perdition."

The effort to secure the panther of the painted skin means, according to them, rather gratification than repression, possession and not repulsion. His reason, having now seen the true nature of sin by the lurid light of the punishment due to it, he buries in the depths of the abyss the inclinations and habits of evil, turning their very cunning into means for the acquisition of more useful knowledge.

Others again see, in the mystic cord, a symbol of the effort made to chain the panther by the sheer force of human will unaided by supernatural strength. In this Dante would have failed if Beatrice at the bidding of Grace had not sent a help and a guide to lead him through the regions of the city on whose gates is written:—

"Justice the founder of my fabric moved."

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He has already seen what fate awaits man, if he fail in the attempt to overcome his passions: he would have failed if left to himself. Realizing that human means are not sufficient, the cord becomes useless.

A third interpretation seems to have an element of greater probability. Dante, in this, in the preceeding, and following cantos treats of an enormous offence against Nature and its Art. He has learned how terrible is the punishment of these sinners. Whilst yet in the abode of malice and violence, Vergil thinks of providing means to reach the circle of Fraud, and summons Geryon, its type and symbol. The monster is introduced before they had seen the offenders against Nature's Art—the usurers who, in plying their wicked trade, must, more or less, practice fraud. Reason, enlightened from above, demands of the obedient follower the cincture, considered here as an emblem of the cardinal virtue of temperance in all things, that the sin of the fraudulent beast may be controlled. Taking the cincture no longer as an allegorical sign indicating either former sins or ineffectual resolutions and futile attempts, it denotes the sacred penitential cord with which the friars of the Franciscan Order gird their loins. It is beyond the peradventure of a doubt, and established by documentary evidence, that Dante lived and died a member of the Third Order of St. Francis. Buti goes further and positively states that the poet actually had belonged to the First Order in his younger days and remained always a faithful and fervent Tertiary.

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When all has been said, however, some hesitation may still be felt as to the exact meaning of the controverted symbol, owing to lack of directness and precision of the lines in question. Perhaps, in embroidering the veil of a vague allegory, Dante, following the bent of his synthetic mind, always suggestive and mystic, intended to include various significations under one symbolic figure, to the exclusion of one most preposterous and absurd, unworthy of his great soul,—the figment of a set of modern dreamers suffering from the effects of a diseased imagination. Having fitted in the bewildering mosaic of the delicately shaded lines more than one allusion, he left the reader free to intelligently interpret his thought.

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### CHAPTER XVII.

In this canto, besides a description of Geryon, is pointed out the punishment visited upon usury considered as an offence against Nature's Art.

God, having created elemental matter, communicated to it the potentiality of an inherent force for the evolving of substantial forms, their reproduction and preservation according to the archetype of his eternal thought. This potentiality becoming operative in the economy of the universe is called by the poet the Art of Nature, whose operations proceeding immediately from it and mediately from the Creator, are the results of the works of God acting through secondary causes.

The prevaricators of the third round, because guilty of usury, have sinned against Nature's Art. In Dante's days, the general conviction prevailed that money in itself was not and could not be productive of any emolument. As far as mere theory is concerned, independent of any other motive, the same view is held at the present time, and justly so. No golden harvest will ever be reaped by the sower of the precious metal. It is only through the bucolic process of burying the seed in the furrowed bosom of the earth that the patient rustic can hope to see the miracle of a georgic resurrection. These are the ways of Nature. The usurer acts in direct opposition to its laws and Art. His money, as such, cannot earn the increment accruing from interest, for the



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simple reason, that it is a physical impossibility. In the Merchant of Venice, Shakespeare voices the sentiment of the Middle Ages on the subject. It is absolutely true that money, in itself, is unproductive, and to endeavor to make it productive is to do violence to the natural law.

Reflex principles, circumstances, and self-evident reasons, however, change altogether the status of the question. Descending from the abstract to the concrete, it must be conceded that borrowed money may yield more than tenfold in the hands of an experienced business man. The lender has a double title to a just portion of the earned increment. In the first place, the profit was made possible by using what was and is his exclusive personal property: furthermore he runs a risk, for the loan often loses itself, and by running this risk he is prevented from using the money as a means to added gain. It is a plain case of a contract between capital and brain, and both are entitled to a proportionate share in the profits. Viewed in this light, the right to charge and claim a just rate of interest on money is a matter of justice.

In an age of great commercial activity and opportunities, to come to any other conclusion would be considered as a dangerous symptom of approaching insanity. Even the treating of such a question may put in motion the machinery of cachinnation. Centuries ago, when speculations were more ideal than financial, other modes of thought obtained. The practice of extorting exorbitant price for the use of

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money called for stringent and severe legislation on transactions of this kind. Public opinion branded the trade of the money changer with the stigma of disrepute. The world has moved; withal, the abstract unproductiveness of gold considered in itself remains a truth—a natural law, the violation of which Dante denounces as an offence against Nature's Art.

This offence is punished in the circle now visited by the pilgrim. At the extreme verge of the desert, the usurers crouch on the ground wailing under a burning rain. Frantically, do they strive to ward off the falling flakes of fire with their hands, even as dogs do in summer when maddened by the bites of flies and gnats. Hanging like a shield from the neck, the wretches wear a pouch marked with the armorial signs of their families upon which their eyes are constantly riveted and yearningly fixed. Sharing the same torments with the violent against God and Nature, these offenders against its Art are decorated with a symbolic badge. The pouch of shame, eternally before the covetous glare of the vile craft, is a fit punishment for the insatiable thirst for gold, and the pleasure derived by looking at it when in the upper world. From the coats of arms, Dante recognizes among the usurers Gianfigliuzzi a Guelf of Florence, the Ghibelline Ubriachi and others, some of them being scions of noble families.

At the summons of Vergil, a monster had slowly emerged from the yawning abyss, in shape most marvellous, a mixture of the human and the animal. Geryon

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is a real historical personage albeit transfigured by the idea of the poet. He had been a great king in Spain reigning over three large provinces of that country. Because fraud had characterized the life of this ancient ruler, he is pressed into service to body forth a vice, "which taints the whole world." Dante represents him as having three forms or natures. The face is that of a man lit up with a smile, not glaring but subdued, mildly bringing out the traits of presumed graciousness and honest benevolence;—the first attribute of Fraud concealing its hideousness under the seemings of virtue, unfelt love, sweet words, and servile fawning. The bust of Geryon, denoting him sufficiently but not entirely, is that of a serpent emblematic of those arts, which reptile-like, Fraud employs to win the good will of the guileless and over-confiding by the false glitter of hues various as "the webs laid on the loom of Arachane" and varied as Turk and Tartar ever wove on Oriental cloth. The beaming smile of that face often darkens the sunshine of God's creation, and the variegated hues of the sinuous snake leave a long train of poison on the grass of many a fragrant meadow. The lower part of this unnatural creature terminates in a scorpion's tail vibrating upwards its venomous fork. It is only after the soothing music of sweet words and the dexterous plying of subtle arts that Fraud finally strikes with its murderous sting the victim charmed into obliviousness of danger by an anæsthetic distilled in the alembic of a most perverted mind.

The enigmatic appearance traced by the poet to ex-



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press the symbol of Fraud has afforded specious opportunities for arbitrarily solving the equation between the sign and the thing symbolized. The allegory studied in the light and spirit of the whole poem becomes plain, and the allusion exceedingly clear. Commentators and scholars, from the fifteenth century down, have held that the monster Geryon is the synthetic presentment of Fraud as explained above. It was reserved for our day, by reviving cabalistic methods, by doing violence to logic and common sense, and by disregarding every canon of sound criticism, to recognize in the beast under consideration the symbol of the Catholic Church.

According to this wonderfully new discovery, Dante painted Geryon with colors dipped in Stygian darkness, and endowed him with attributes and qualities hideous and detestable in order to hold up the Church to the execration of the world. After having read the Divine Comedy line by line, who will not be filled with utter disgust for an assertion which traduces the great Tuscan and wrongs a hallowed memory? His profound veneration for the Church he loved so well speaks eloquently from a thousand lines hymning to her divine origin, her mission, her trials, and her triumphs. Verily, he boldly hurls the thunderbolts of his righteous indignation against those persons, that, now and then, by their lives and questionable actions, would have made her appear what she was not. Enthusiastic devotion to her suggested, at times, a word, perhaps, too harsh, but this word always struck the individual and not the in-



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stitution, the man and not the office. The resigned gentle sigh of purgatory is heard in the music of his verse; the splendor of heaven's glory is seen through the theological conceptions of his song. How could he have been guilty of throwing the tattered mantle of shame on the shoulders of that mother whose children he transformed into odorous flowers blooming in the sunshine of God's smile! Useless are the efforts of Dante's enemies to tarnish the escutcheon of his fair name, to dim the luster, to jar the harmony, and to deface the beauty of his deathless poem. Dante was a Catholic, the inspiration of his song was Catholic, and to assert the contrary is to argue oneself ignorant, if not worse.

Giosuè Carducci, one of the greatest poets of Italy at the present time, is not a Christian either by birth or inclination; his ode in honor of Satan may be taken as an index of his belief. When a Dantesque chair was established in the Roman university in 1887, the position was offered by the Government to this eminent scholar profoundly versed in all the branches of Italian literature. Carducci, whose sincerity equals his learning, declined the honor, giving the reasons for so doing in a letter that I transcribe textually. "The spirit that informed this law . . . is such that any one who accepts the Dantesque chair at Rome must have, in regard to the political opinions and religious doctrines of Dante, convictions which I have not. For me, the greatness of Dante does not go beyond the circle of the Middle Ages, and the strictest kind

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of Catholicism. The reformation which Ugo Foscolo imagined the Florentine desired and would bring about in the Church did not touch dogmatic tenets in the least. He aimed at a form of Catholicity more rigid, more ascetic and more prepotent. None dreamed more ideally than Alighieri, and none more than he would have politically approved a conciliation between Pope and Emperor.\*

Carducci has made long meditations on the Divine Comedy, has thoroughly analyzed its import, and fully comprehended its scope, object, and ultimate end. The letter given above expresses the synthesis of his studies. This exegesis of the Dantesque thought, coming from an authority that is necessarily above suspicion, should forever silence the prating of a set of writers whose strong prejudices warp the judgment of their minds. It would be well for them to remember that there is no factor more fatal to the healthy growth of literature than the foul vapors rising from the abyss of cabalistic fraud.

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\* NOTE.—Gl' intendimenti con i quali fu dettata quella legge . . . sono tali che a qual sia per accettare l'insegnamento dantesco in Roma richiedono intorno alle opinioni e alle dottrine politiche e religiose di Dante, una persuasione che io non ho. Per me, la grandezza di Dante non esce dal crechio del medio evo, e dello stretto cattolicismo: la riforma che Ugo Foscolo immagino tendesse egli a fare valere nella chiesa non toccava, se mai, i dogmi: mirava a un cattolicismo più rigido, più ascetico, più prepotente. Nessuno più dell'Alighieri idealmente vagheggio, nessuno più dell'Alighieri avrebbe politicamente approvato una conciliazione tra il papa e l'imperatore."

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The poets born on the shoulders of the vaulting beast are wafted in the thick air, and begin slowly and almost imperceptibly to sink in the void along side of the roaring Phlegeton. Dante was now assailed by a fear as overpowering and strong as that which congealed the blood in the veins of Phaëthon when the steeds of his father's chariot dashed across the heavens. The sound of cries and wailings becoming more distinct and loud made them realize that they were drawing near the fourth division of hell,—the Malebolgie, where Fraud, in ten pouches or rounds, shrieked the full gamut of a punishment most perfectly accorded with its various measures of malice. The accursed tribe was divided into ten categories of sinners—panders and seducers; flatterers; simonists; diviners, soothsayers and magicians; barrators; hypocrites; thieves; fraudulent counselors; sowers of discord and schism; falsifiers of all sorts.

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### CHAPTER XVIII.

Dismounting from Geryon's back, Vergil and Dante begin the dismal visitation of the Malebolgie, the ten sunless ditches, where are pouched up the vile transgressors. This part of hell is represented as a vast concave prison, circular in form and encompassed by a towering wall looming darkly in the shade of iron gray. From the outward bulwark, ten concentric valleys or gulfs, deep and broad, slope downward, each separated by parallel lines of bristling crags, and spanned by rugged rocks leading to the lower pit.

Turning as usual to the left, the pilgrim and his guide take their stand on the bridge arching the first pouch. From it, they observe how are punished the panders to the lust of others, and the seducers of women. Naked, they run without rest, those going from, and these coming toward the poets. Horned devils, armed with whips and scourges, savagely track them. When the sinners halt for a moment in their eternal course, the demons lash them so fiercely that the wretches spring forward at once and again rush on without waiting for the second blow.

The difference in the manner of punishment inflicted on the same generic class of offenders confined in the second circle of the first division, and in this pouch, is founded on the reason that, according to the poet, panders and seducers employ fraud to consummate the



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deed; therefore, the force impelling them to a never ceasing and perpetual motion is of a nature more terrible and relentless. Demons, mighty in power and filled with hatred, appear for the first time here, whilst blind elements or mythological beings are chosen there as the ministers of divine wrath. Scanning the multitude of ghosts, Dante recognizes Venedico Caccianimico who sacrificed the honor of his sister Guisolabella to the evil pleasures of the Marquis of Ferrara. Vergil points out Jason, the hero of the Argonautic expedition.

From the rampart, on which the first bridge abuts, they pass on to the second and see the flatterers in the gulf below. The sycophantic tribe wallows in a fetid pool of human excrement, whose exhalations cover the sides of the bank with a most loathsome mold. The honied tongues that liked the sores of absurd vanity, in order to impose on the superstitious credulity of imbecility, the mendacious lips that whispered soft words of praise, to set a blister on the fair forehead of innocence, are condemned by poetic justice to a most appropriate punishment. Plunged in that foul mire, these parasites, thriving on human infirmities and weaknesses, beat themselves desperately with their hands, scarcely able to utter a moan or relieve themselves by a sigh.

Alessio Intermini, the master flatterer of Lucca, is singled out, and also Thais, the Theban harlot, who by witching arts led men to sin.

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### CHAPTER XIX.

Ascending a rock that juts out over the chasm, the poets look down upon another ditch. Its sides and bottom are pierced here and there with circular apertures resembling cylindrical tombs or pits. Each one is tenanted by a sinner planted, as it were, therein with head downward. The limbs and feet project upward from the orifice like branches of trees, and shake and twitch convulsively. Along the soles of the feet, from the heel to the toes, a lambent flame creeps up slowly feeding on the quivering flesh. These are ecclesiastics, who by bartering and selling the holy things of God and religion had stained their souls with the guilt of simony;—the first moral error that was ever born to afflict the Church, and the last to die.

Dante, the firm, uncompromising believer, clearly seeing by the light of common sense the distinction between the office and the man, scourges with whips of iron the personal, wilful, systematic breach of a sacred trust. Fearing lest contracted, petty minds, befogged by prejudices, should most illogically argue a general condition from particular and isolated facts, and purposely mistake the exceptional for the usual, the abnormal for the normal, the poet hurls the bolts of unequivocal denunciation against simoniacal abuses. In doing so, he but re-echoes the voice of the Church time and again, in council assembled, whose legislation on the subject and

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canonical deliberations were well known to him. The impious, the scoffer, and the maligner were not to be permitted to make use of a specious pretext to vilify and traduce the Bride of Christ. Popes, Cardinals, Bishops, and Saints had stigmatized the crying evil before, and applied the most caustic remedies to burn it out of the body religious whenever and wherever the cankerous sore made its appearance. On the pages of history, are registered the names of those who performed this simple duty, St. Bernard, St. Peter Damian, and a host of others. Gregory VII., the greatest Pope of the Middle Ages, died in exile because he stood as a wall of brass against the attacks of sacerdotal or imperial simony. Dante forgot to bury in the tombs of the third pouch some emperors and barons who would have been eminently fitted for the place.

His abiding faith in the eternal youth, vigor and power of the Church to save, bless, and sanctify society appears to a greater advantage by the reflection of the lurid fires of hell.

In no other canto, perhaps, of this part of the poem will the reader find a stronger profession of Dante's Catholic principles. Bitterly does he reproach a Pope for a sin that was supposed to have a relish of simony in it; scorn, irony, sarcasm and invective rush from his lips like a blazing torrent of lava; no circumstance can be urged to extenuate, no reason to excuse the deed.

The Tuscan rises even to the dignity of a judge, pitiless and inexorable; but the very spirit that inspired the sentence against the individual, makes him bow down



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before the sacredness of the office. We can almost hear the angry tones of that voice thundering at first amidst the crash and din of the infernal regions ; then gradually sinking to a whisper as he adds :—

"If reverence of the keys restrained me not,  
Which thou in happier times didst hold, I yet  
Severer speech might use."

Reason symbolized in Vergil approves the homage paid to truth.

"My teacher was well pleased, with so composed  
A lip he listened ever to the sound  
Of the true words I uttered."

The simonists, as stated above, were buried with head downward in circular tombs. These churchmen who should have raised heart and mind to heaven are now turned in an inverted position to indicate the deformity, the impropriety of earthly thoughts and aspirations in a consecrated life. The fire that burns but does not consume is a type of that insatiable increase of appetite for wealth which grew once by what it fed on.

Vergil carries Dante from the bridge to the vale below to enable him to hear the tale of wrongs from the lips of the prevaricators themselves. Standing by one of the many apertures, he learns that the tenant half entombed in it is Pope Nicolas III. Mistaking the voice of the poet for that of Boniface VIII., the shade wonders much that he came to hell so soon, for the appointed eight years of his pontificate had not yet elapsed. Boni-



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face, he adds, is not to wait long for a follower, because Clement V. will, in a short time, succeed him at the post of ignominy and torments.

The fiction of this peculiar sort of punishment rests on the supposition that every simoniacal Pope does remain in that particular place till relieved by the death of another Pontiff similarly guilty. When this new comer arrives, he himself is dragged through the fissure to the very bottom of the rock. Three Popes are delivered by Dante to the torments of the third pouch because they had been fellow travellers on the same path beaten by Simon Magus. Were they, in reality, as criminal as the first simonist and guilty of all the charges preferred against them? Can the higher court of history sustain the decision? It is evident that in answering these questions, the sin of simony, impersonally considered, is and must be entirely condemned. It is a grievous, enormous, horrible offence against religion deserving the punishment invented by the poet, and more. No doubt many have disgraced by it the sacred ministry, and brought shame on the clerical profession since the early days of Christianity. The present issue, however, is personal. The Florentine reproves by name three Popes, but the one against whom he turns the full force of his animosity is Boniface VIII. of the noble Gaetanis of Anagni. To find a possible explanation for the virulence of the attack, we must touch lightly upon the events that took place in the life time of the author.

Owing to a train of untoward circumstances, Florence carried within its own walls the quarrels and feuds of

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Pistoja. Rent into two hostile camps of the Bianchi and Neri, the city went through all the horrors of a civil war. Law and order were superseded for a long time by street brawls, tumults, and clashing of arms. The Bianchi, belonging to old aristocratic families, availed themselves of this state of affairs to strengthen their own party, and offer a most determined opposition to the plebeian Neri, who championed the aspirations and new ideas of the rising power of merchants and traders. Dante, a patrician by birth and instinct, arrayed himself against the popular movement, and fought for the supremacy of his own caste. Tired, at last, of an endless contest which boded general disaster to both parties, the Neri had recourse to the interposition of the Pope. Boniface summoned to Rome the representative men of each faction, and patiently heard their accusations and mutual recriminations. To ascertain the truth of the alleged facts, and with a view to effect a compromise, he sent to Florence Cardinal Acquasparta. Unable to reconcile the claims and pretensions of conflicting interests, or even to check the fury of unchained passions, the Legate left the city in despair putting it under interdict. Then it was that Corso Donati, the leader of the Neri, induced the Pope, as a last resort, to send Charles of Valois, brother of the King of France, as a peace-maker attended by a military escort strong enough to enforce obedience to his orders and deliberations. The Bianchi strenuously opposed the proposal, and set themselves at work to frustrate its actuation. Charles, however, came; the Neri received him with every manifestation of

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joy; the stubborn patricians rose up in arms; the issue was not what had been expected; the Bianchi went down in defeat, their homes were pillaged and burned, and six hundred of them were banished from the territory. Among the exiles were Petrarco dell'Ancisa, father of Petrarca, and Dante himself. For years he wandered through Italy and France, mourning the cruel fate that made him an outcast, interdicted from ever seeing again his beloved Florence. With his eyes always turned to it, he sought every opportunity, employed every means to procure and obtain the revocation of the edict. Many times he wrote imploring to be allowed to return, one of his letters beginning with the biblical words, "Popule mi, quid feci tibi?"\* The petition was finally granted but, on condition, that he should undergo the usual formality of being publicly offered and presented to the Patron Saint on St. John's day with a lighted candle in his hand and the customary penitential covering of the head. Dante scornfully refused to comply with the detested observance; others might submit to the general law, he was above it, and not as a penitent, but as a distinguished citizen would he enter the city made illustrious by his talents and fame.

From that hour, says Boccaccio in his "Vita di Dante," he turned from a Guelf into a fierce Ghibelline, so narrow and fanatic that he would have stoned even women and children had they dared assail the name now sacred to him. Cut to the quick by humiliation and shame, sick at heart at the ingratitude of man, chafing

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\*Oh! my people, what have I ever done to thee?



## INTRODUCTION TO "DANTE'S INFERNO"

under the insolence of victory and feeling the anguish of a life made unbearable by exile, his proud, overbearing, aristocratic soul always impatient of restraint or contradiction towered in gigantic strength against the base plebeian rabble of Florence, those upstarts of a new race of merchants and traders, their abettors and friends. A change came over the spirit of his dreams; the stranger is now welcome; the hated foreigner is asked to cross the Alps, and Henry of Luxemburg is hailed as the future avenger of wrongs.

It was under these circumstances that the Divine Comedy, conceived and begun long before, as we are told by the author himself, in the closing lines of the "*Vita Nuova*," was continued and brought to an end. Dante again took down the harp and passionately touching its resonant strings added to his song many new motives without substantially changing the original scope and orientation of the melodious theme. In the dedication of the poem to the Gran Cane della Scala, he traced the initial words "*Incipit comoedia Dantis Aligherii Florentini natione non moribus.*"\*

Is it any wonder that the exile, with the arrow still festering in the wound, should have included Boniface among the victims of his bitter invectives and objurgations? Many of the severe strictures on the character and actions of this Pope lack the foundation of historical truth. Without being a saint, he was certainly free from the crimes and sacrilegious sins imputed to him.

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\*Beginning of the comedy of Dante Alighieri Florentine by birth and not by manners.



## INTRODUCTION TO "DANTE'S INFERNO"

Boccaccio bears testimony to this asseveration. Petrarca, the second literary man of national reputation in Italy, calls him "the wisest of men." A vast array of authorities could be produced in vindication of the much calumniated and misrepresented Pontiff. To mention only few, the reader is referred to the works of Pierre la Flotte, Raynald, Rubei, Plank, Hefle, Reumont, Hergenröther, Matthieu, Cantu, Weis and Plunkett. Some of the writers mentioned above cannot be suspected of partiality to Rome. Boniface VIII. was a strong man of great abilities, versed in ecclesiastical and secular lore, penetrated with the importance of the mission which the Middle Ages imposed on the incumbent of the Pontifical throne. It is the fault of the times, not his, that some achievements of his reign do not square with the rule or agree with the spirit of our present civilization. Many charges laid at the door of Gaetani by such historians as Gregorovius, the learned Tosti and Audusio have clearly demonstrated to be either grossly exaggerated or absolutely groundless. Cardinal Wiseman very pertinently remarks, that whilst severe and inflexible, at times, perhaps, too inexorable in the assertion of rights and the punishment of evil doers, the integrity of his private and public conduct has never been questioned by fair minded, candid, and honest adversaries. The Voltairean method of throwing mud failed in this case, and no biographic chemistry is needed to bleach spots out of his life.

The principal accusation of simony, preferred by Dante, is based on the supposition that Boniface bought

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the tiara from Charles d'Anjou. Cesare Cantù justly observes that this charge must fall on the evidence of history. Owing to the political situation then obtaining in Italy, it would have been a matter of vital importance to this king that so formidable, determined and keen an opponent as Cardinal Gaetani should never wear the crown of Rome. Another man of the temper of Celestine V. would have better suited the designing ambition of the royal brother of France. Furthermore, all contemporary writers are, without a single exception, silent on the subject of the intrigue in question. Many were the enemies of Boniface, and yet, there is no record left of the simoniacal transaction. The most inveterate foes of the Pope were the powerful Colonnas. They tried every possible means and artifice to accomplish his ruin, and to prove and declare his election invalid, but the only argument urged was that he had been elected before the death of his predecessor. No proof is found of their ever having claimed what in reality would have annulled his title and right to the Papal dignity—the simoniacal purchase of it from Charles.

The Pope had incurred Dante's personal animosity; his unpardonable sin was that he had sent to Florence a peace-maker, who did not make peace; that under him the recalcitrant Bianchi had suffered defeat; for this, he must burn in the Malebolgie of hell. Withal, when in purgatory, the vision of the noble figure of Boniface VIII. betrayed, insulted, and surrounded at Anagni by the satellites of Philip of France bent on a new crucifixion of the Vicar of Christ on earth, that sight sub-

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dued his Ghibelline rancor, and firing his soul with indignation made him cry out:—

" . . . lo! the flower-de-luce  
Enters Alagna; in his Vicar Christ  
Himself a captive, and his mockery  
Acted again. Lo! to his holy lip  
The vinegar and gall once more applied;  
And he 'twixt living robbers doomed to bleed.  
Lo! the new Pilate, of whose cruelty  
Such violence cannot fill the measure up,  
With no degree of sanction, pushes on  
Into the temple his yet eager sails."

Purgatory C. XX Ver. 85-94.

After reading these verses, even the most skeptical is forced to admit that the words of Carducci are true.

Let us pass on to consider the second Pope suffering in the Dantesque Hell, Giovanni, Gaetano Orsini, known as Nicholas III. The poet tells us that he is "pouched up" in that awful prison because he had been too anxious and too zealous to put money into the pockets of his relatives. The justice of the indictment is not entirely denied, in so far as he provided places of honor and emolument for the members of the Orsini family. Being a temporal, as well as a spiritual prince, this action, without approving it, cannot be unconditionally condemned if we regard it in the light of the times. To give to kinsmen what may have belonged to the patrimony of a temporal principality does not fall under the heading of simony, nor is it a species of it. This sin



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consists in the bartering of sacred things in the commercial sense of the word.

The same criterions may be applied to the questionable doings of Clement V., the future candidate for the honors of the infernal pouch. The head and front of his offence was the transferring of the Papal see from Italy to France, of which country he was a native. The incident of Avignon can never fail to engender feelings of resentment in the soul of every patriotic Italian; be it said to the peace of those who would use the Divine Comedy as a shibboleth of sacrosanct political aspirations.

In treating this question, I have been constrained by necessity to be brief, for it was not my intention, nor my purpose to write a history of the Church, or an apology of the Popes. It may be added in conclusion, that in the rapid review of the case no assertion has been hazarded without having previously consulted reliable sources of information, no statement ventured without having diligently looked for verification in standard works of authority, no fact presented without corroboration of authentic testimony, nor any effort made to palliate or conceal aught.



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### CHAPTER XX.

Vergil, having taken Dante in his arms, carries him to the bridge spanning the fourth pouch. A strange sight presents itself to the tabulator of different species of sins and the punishment due to them. The poet sees a vast multitude of shades mournfully and silently marching with measured step in solemn procession. Their forms are most frightfully distorted as if by palsy. The upper part of the face and head is so twisted and reversed in a more or less degree of hideousness that the chin and beard make the shoulders of the sinners their breast. Unable to see before them, they are obliged to advance with a backward step; they shed copious tears. No other pain seemed to torment that weeping and melancholy throng moving on and on, overwhelmed in sorrow, and not relieved even by sigh or moan. It was the fraternity of diviners, soothsayers, and magicians supposed to have been gifted with the knowledge of coming events, and other such preternatural endowments.

Many are found in our own days who under various names derived from ancient roots practice arts that are black, and gravely claim the possession and exercise of wondrous powers; and still the wonder grows that their shallow-pated disciples should daily increase both in number and quality. Our surprise will cease if we season our admiration with a little knowledge of human nature which is the same the world over. We read that

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Julius Cæsar, who did not believe in the gods of Rome, was scrupulously faithful to the habit of putting charms and amulets around his neck before going to war. Did not the perfidious and irreligious Louis XI. of France line or upholster his royal hat with leaden images to preserve from evil his worthless life? Horace tells us that the Roman matrons, their patrician husbands, their daughters, and their sons often went on pious pilgrimages to the Esquiline under cover of a starless night to consult some toothless old hag from Etruria who, in virtue of superlative witchcraft, could draw the stars from heaven, and gibber out oracular lies. Greece and the Orient had many a gilded tripod from which came the mysterious voice. Pan died at the dawn of the Christian era, but Apollo continues to live and cater to human infatuation.

The meridian light of our modern civilization has not succeeded in entirely dispelling the shadows of the Dark Ages and those preceding them. Such is the potent charm of the words spoken in Eden, "Ye shall be like gods," that under the name of Theosophism, Occultism, Spiritualism, and other isms innumerable men who refuse to believe what God has taught will degrade themselves by accepting doctrines and tenets at once absurd and blasphemous, unworthy of intelligent beings. Aspiring to a prerogative that reason proves to be the exclusive attribute of the Deity, rash and foolish mortals would fain project themselves into forbidden realms in order to know what is hidden in the dark womb of the future. Instead of adoring the majesty of God, they

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would usurp his throne ; instead of bowing down before the dispositions of Providence and waiting for its inscrutable manifestations, they would rush into the council chamber of the Eternal. By an act of irrational temerity, they consciously break the very law of their being. A change for the worse results as a most inexorable consequence from the effort to transcend the limitations of human nature. Pain deep and silent racks the spirit of presumption, and eyes blinded by a light too strong for their vision shed most bitter tears.

These lines are not meant for a sermon or a lecture on ethics ; they interpret the thought of Dante expressed in the eighteenth and nineteenth verses of the canto under consideration.

"Now, reader ! think within thyself, so God  
Fruit of thy reading give thee."

The fitness of the punishment imagined for diviners, soothsayers, and magicians is evident. They pretended or made others believe that they were able to read the scroll of futurity. Their faces are now set backwards ; they move with a slow step and weep over the fatal results of a will "most incorrect to Heaven." The sad plight and condition of these sinners so affect Dante that the depths of his soul are stirred with strong feelings of compassion. Reason immediately reproves the sentiment.

"What, and art thou, too, witless as the rest ?  
Here pity most doth show herself alive,

## INTRODUCTION TO "DANTE'S INFERNO"

When she is dead. What guilt exceedeth his  
Who with Heaven's judgment in his passion strives?"

Verily, the Catholicism of Dante is, "*very rigid.*"

In that long procession of ghosts, prominently march Amphiaraus, one of the seven kings that besieged Thebes; Tiresias, the soothsayer; Arunus, the star gazer of the Etruscan mountains; Manto, the sorceress for whom Maunta was called; Eurypylus who with Calchas gave the sign to cut the first cable at Aulis, the necromancer, Michael Scott, and the astrologer of Forli.

At break of day, being already Saturday, the poets leaving the fourth valley continue their pilgrim progress.



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### CHAPTER XXI.

Standing on the bridge of the fifth pouch, Dante looks down, hardly able to distinguish any object, for darkness broods over the place. At the bottom of the gulf, a pool of boiling pitch could only be discerned by the bubbles here and there breaking through its glutinous surface. In that liquid mass, were steeped in torments, the barrators—rulers and princes who had sold offices and dignities; inferior functionaries who had extorted money for the free gifts of their masters; bribe-takers and suborners of every description. Venality in the administration of distributive and commutative justice, corruption in the management of public affairs, dishonesty in the discharge of sacred trusts, had filled that dark lake with criminals guilty, as it were, of the sin of civil and political simony. Had it ever existed other than in the imagination of the poet, how wide and deep and broad would that gulf have to be now!

A throng of hideous demons, called Malebranche, keep watchful guard along the gloomy shores. Fierce and cruel these winged fiends of hell hover about armed with long prongs and hooks. Should, from time to time, any of the tribe succeed by stealth in crawling out on the banks they would incontinently tear him to pieces with their iron grapples; or, if to obtain a momentary relief, any should dare rise above the surface, they would beat

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him back and hold him down with prongs, as scullions do to keep meat from floating in a hissing caldron.

The poetic invention of this punishment is in keeping with the end Dante had always in view. Black as the boiling pitch, is the action of the sordid knave who sells favors, breaks trusts, or sacrifices duty for the sake of gold. Adhesiveness is one of the principal qualities of pitch, and is used here as a symbol of the tenacity with which the barrator holds on to ill-gotten goods and money; whatever he touches, he stains; even so does pitch. In darkness, by subterfuge and secrecy, he carries on a shameful traffic that cannot bear the light of the day; a thick integument of resinous matter hides him completely from sight. In the demons, who are the ministers of the punishment inflicted on barratry Dante symbolizes various aspects of the same sin. Malefactors of this kind do, and must, in the natural course of events, quarrel among themselves; they try to overreach each other in cunning and evil doing; nothing affords them more delight than the disgrace, the sufferings, and misfortunes of fellow-sinners. The Malebranche represent this phase in the evolution of joint crime. Their names indicate the thoughts of the author. They not only find a grim pleasure in tormenting their victims, but, as it will be seen in the next chapter, two of them actually come to a hand to hand contest. The honest Tuscan is frightened by the looks and appearance of the demons. Vergil reassures him, and approaches alone the unclean herd to force a passage through the place. Furious opposition and threats do not move him.

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" . . . . . Pass we then;  
For so Heaven's pleasure is, that I should lead  
Another through this savage wilderness."

No idle words these, nor meaningless. Hell itself and all the passions that war within the human breast cannot prevent reason from journeying through the city of woe in order to see the manner in which sin is punished. The light, the knowledge, the terror, derived from the contemplation will lead, persuade, and move the will to do good and avoid evil in order to escape the terrible fate.

Malacoda, the chief of the infernal troop, is finally conquered. A type of the dark ways of the barrators, this devil sets himself now to deceive Vergil by stating a truth and making it the base for a lie that is to prove his and his companion's destruction. He tells them that one thousand two-hundred and sixty-six years, one day and five hours had passed away since the bridge spanning, near by, the next pouch had been destroyed by the earthquake which shook the mundane planet at the death of Christ.\* As Vergil does not any longer know the way, having gone before over the rock that once jutted to the other side, the fraudulent spirit offers to send eleven of the tribe to guide them,

" . . . . . where the other crag  
Uninterrupted traverses the dens."

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\*The time of the action of the Divine Comedy being then Holy Saturday morning in the Holy Week of 1266, this date represents the number of years from the death of the Saviour.

## INTRODUCTION TO "DANTE'S INFERNO"

Malacoda is lying because all the bridges arching that gulf had been shattered. The intention was to compass the ruin of the poets. Another truth veiled in transparent allegory bodying forth the wiles, the deceits, and the artifices of the power of darkness leagued and combined with human passions to obstruct in man the healthy exercise of reason, and by misleading it pave the way to error and eternal death. Under escort of such dangerous guides, Vergil and Dante resume their journey along the shores of the fifth pouch.



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### CHAPTER XXII.

Dante's natural aversion to, and suspicion of the demons, made the advantage of their company and assistance a matter of great apprehension, deriving a poor consolation from the reflection that it may become necessary at times to sit,

" . . . . . in the church

With saints, with gluttons at the tavern's mess."

Owing to the impossibility of distinguishing from the bridge the shades of the barrators, because darkness covered the pouch, the poets had to descend from the ramparts and walk close to the margin of the boiling pitch. Some sinners appeared in the caliginous twilight standing like toads with their heads out of the pool, whilst others rose at intervals to the surface to obtain a brief respite. At the sight of the watchful sentinels, they would hastily vanish, diving under the ponderous wave. One wretch, not quick enough to elude the vigilance of the fiends, was set upon by Graffiacane, who ferociously dragged him up with his formidable prongs. The rest of the infernal crew swarmed howling around the spot to wreak their hatred and fury on the too daring ghost. It proved to be Ciampolo of Navarre who had turned his thoughts in life to the shameful transactions of barratry. In the midst of horrible torments inflicted on him, he is allowed to tell his name, and those of such vessels of

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guile kept under the tar, as friar Gomita, and Michael Zanche. To escape further punishment from his torturers, Ciampolo proposes to them to call up more sinners from the bottom of the lake if they would, for a little while, leave him alone with Vergil and Dante. The prospect of having a larger number of victims is very alluring, and the trick proves efficient. No sooner have the Malebranche withdrawn than the wiley Navarrese leaps back into the pitch. Rage stung the spirits duped by the vulgar barrator, and most of all Alichino, who with speedy wings, darts to dire revenge; but it is too late; the prey has already plunged past the danger of his talons. Calcabrina, exasperated by the failure of Alichino, flies after him, and the two demons engage in terrible combat which ends by both falling in the seething pitch. This fray, and the cause that occasioned it, emblematic of the deceptions and snares, recriminations and violence attending barratry, Dante calls the exhibition of a sport new for those tristful regions. The farce played under the lurid lights of hell is enacted at times on the stage of the world where deceit overreaches cunning, and roguery cheats craft. Barbariccia hastens to lead the troop to the rescue, and the poets go their silent way alone.

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### CHAPTER XXIII.

In the two preceding chapters, the attention of the reader was directed to the understanding of a truth conveyed under the allegory of the opposition of the demons to Dante's progress in his journey through hell. Unable to accomplish this, they had sought to mislead his reason impersonated in Vergil. Passions and the powers of darkness strive to turn the mind from the contemplation of the punishment due to sin, and to lead it astray by devious paths that make for death.

The apprehension of that danger continues to pre-occupy the mind of the Tuscan at the opening of this canto. Vergil sent by Beatrice is at his side. Reason, enlightened by Theology and strengthened by Grace, can overcome all impediments and avoid the pit-falls of deception; withal he fears.

Taking up again the symbolic narrative, Dante implores his guide to take him out of that accursed gulf beyond the reach of the fiends. He imagines that the Malebranche, foiled in their purpose, are even then urging pursuit. The Roman admits the reality of the impending peril and the necessity of warding it off by resolute action. If the summit of the bank separating the fifth from the sixth pouch could be gained, it would be easy to let themselves down on the other side. The words had hardly been spoken when the enraged demons, with spread wings, were seen rushing forward.



## INTRODUCTION TO "DANTE'S INFERNO"

Vergil at once takes Dante in his arms, mounts the sloping ridge, and lying on his back slides along the edge, holding on his breast the precious burden as gently as the mother her babe. Scarcely had their feet touched the bottom of the depths below, when the enemies appeared on the battlements above; but there was no longer reason to fear; they were safe,

" . . . . . for that high Providence,  
Which placed them ministers of the fifth fosse,  
Power of departing thence took from them all."

In this pouch, the sixth of the iron-walled prison, innumerable shades wearily and with painful effort, as if encumbered by a heavy weight, dragged themselves along moaning and shedding tears. They are completely covered with long cloaks, strange in appearance and texture, for they are made of lead brightly painted and richly gilded outside, but inside dark and stained. Their faces are hidden under hoods of the same metal, similarly decorated. Divine art, according to the Florentine idea of æsthetic morality, had woven these many colored garments for

"The college of the mourning hypocrites."

The retribution of hypocrisy is appropriately imagined by Dante, who must have seen many varieties of it. This species of Fraud tried to disguise, under the glitter of gold, the true nature of baser metals, and to besmear systematic wrong doing with the seemings of virtue. The attempt, to gratify secret ambition and other vulgar pas-



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sions by veiling the thought and the deed with the robe of sanctimonious conduct, must be atoned in the Dantesque Hell by wearing a vesture, beautiful without but cumbersome within. Painted and hooded beyond the possibility of recognition, the hypocrites pace with tardy step the eternal circle oppressed by that counterfeit presentment, which, in the upper world, made them a living lie. With tears, they bewail the folly of having presumed to pass as current a coin that seemed good, but had no value.

Dante, adjusting with much difficulty his gait to that of two shades, the Guelf Catalano and the Ghibelline Loderigo, learns that they had belonged to the military Order of the Knights of St. Mary, then commonly known as the Jovial Friars.

Crucified upon the ground with three stakes, Caiphas rues the jealousy and the envy which made him say, "It is expedient for us that one man should die for the people." Being considered as the principal offender of the tribe, all the sinners, slowly moving, step on him that he may feel the full weight of the punishment. Annas and the members of the Sanhedrim bear company to the high priest. Having died before the trial and death of the Saviour, the sight of the prostrate form causes Vergil to marvel much.

Informed by Catalano about the way to the next pouch, he and Dante leave the abode of hypocrisy.

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### CHAPTER XXIV.

In order to reach the bridge set over the seventh gulf, the poets were obliged to climb a mound of ruins, strenuously pushing from rock to rock. Although this embankment was not as high as the outer ones, because the Malebolgie sloped downward to the central abyss, yet so great had been the exertion and the fatigue attending the ascent, that Dante sank down exhausted on the summit, despairing of going further. The dominant thought of the poem underlies the allegorical fact here set forth. His mind was laboring under a great stress consequent on the search of moral truths as explained above. The long continued effort and the difficulty of the subject had well nigh dulled the edge of resolution. The task appeared to be entirely beyond the power and strength of a mortal.

Reason, in the person of Vergil, emboldens and cheers the wavering soul clogged by sense and matter.

" . . . . . Vanquish thy weariness  
By the mind's effort, in each struggle formed  
To vanquish, if she suffer not the weight  
Of her corporeal frame to crush her down.  
A longer ladder yet remains to scale.  
From these to have escaped sufficeth not."

The words reproaching him for lack of courage and perseverance, want of patience and endurance, rouse the

## INTRODUCTION TO "DANTE'S INFERNO"

will to determined action. "Rise up" cries the messenger of heaven beaoning forward. Dante obeys the call, and, "on," he answers, "for I am now stout and fearless."

The journey is continued along a rugged path till they come to a crag jutting over the chasm. This being too deep and dark to see or hear anything from above, a descent is made to the depths below.

Here, thieves are expiating their sins committed against justice, and are divided in three classes; those who, allured by occasion or opportunity, had yielded to temptation on the spur of the moment without any previous deliberation or thought; those who, by force of thieving habits, had to a great extent almost changed the stamp of nature; and finally, those wretches who, by carefully laid plans, had become so habituated to systematic stealing as to entirely transform the very instincts of rational beings into those of preying animals.

The prevaricators run naked in a vast ditch shrouded in darkness among swarms of venomous serpents. The deserts of Lybia and Ethiopia could not boast of a more prolific and pestilential breed. The hands of the sinners are tied behind their backs with loathsome snakes which twist themselves in many folds around the livid bodies. Some, bitten by them, immediately take fire and burn into ashes, from which, Phoenix-like, they rise again clothed in their former seemings—these belong to the first category. Huge reptiles, ferociously darting on others, cover them in a violent convulsive embrace; by degrees, the quivering human flesh and the form of



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the animal so mingle together that the monster and the man melt into one strange whole, withal, "appearing neither two nor one." The horrors of this partial transformation add torments to a special class of law breakers whose sin is aggravated by acquired propensities. The third category of transgressors who had methodically and fraudulently devised, planned, and carried out the iniquitous trade are punished in the same manner, but with them the metamorphosis is so complete, that, having been changed into serpents, they dash hissing and sputtering around the unclean den. Returning after some time to the former shape, each shade begins again the rounding of the eternal circle.

Only the first division of sinners is treated in this canto.

Whilst looking upon that infernal scene, the pilgrims notice a snake bolting like a flash of lightning after a ghost winged with fear. The instant its fangs dart into his neck a flame shoots up, and he falls incinerated to the ground; the smouldering ashes tremble and from them he springs again in the vesture of his former self, gazing around bewildered, surprised, sorrowing, as the victim of temptation often wonders how it was possible that the deed could ever have been done.

The penalty inflicted on this sin is appropriately invented by Dante. He hears the culprit's confessions of the crime. Under the impulse of the moment, Vanni Fucci had sacrilegiously filched the treasure of a church in Pistoia—the city whence all evils came to Florence.



## INTRODUCTION TO "DANTE'S INFERNO"

### CHAPTER XXV.

Fucci, who had been one of the Neri faction, insults and mocks Dante who belongs to the Bianchi, and takes a malicious pleasure in prophesying the impending calamity of his party, but at the sound of a roaring voice crying out, "Where is the caitiff?" the base reviler flees in terror. A Centaur appears, rushing in close pursuit after him. Snakes are coiled around his body, and a dragon, with open wings, sits on his shoulders. Vergil tells the astonished Tuscan that it is the spirit of Cacus who, under the Aventine rock, stole the cattle of Hercules.

Two Florentines are now discovered—Brunelleschi and Sciancato; both had given themselves up to habitual thieving; three more draw near in the shape of serpents, Cianfa, Donati, and Cavalcante. In the torments and transformations of these five shades, are represented the second and third classes of offenders against the seventh commandment.

The partial metamorphosis of Brunelleschi proves him to be of the number of those, who, by force of habit, gradually became hardened in sin. Cianfa, entirely transformed into a reptile, having sprung upon, and stung him, the wretch goes through the stages of mutation, and, in that wise, slowly crawls away, "nor double now nor only one." Dante, scarcely believing the testimony of his own eyes, perceives a little fiery serpent,

## INTRODUCTION TO "DANTE'S INFERNO"

"livid and swart," under whose guise, Cavalcante is hidden, viciously attacking Donati. Instantly, the latter takes up the animal whilst the former returns to his human shape. Sciancato is the only one that for the moment remains unchanged.

The graphic descriptions of the metamorphoses of this canto, more wonderful than Ovid's mythological dreams, are presented to the reader in words truly vivid and realistic. All the resources and genius of the Italian language had to be brought into play in order to clothe in terse expression the difficult symbols conceived in the poet's mind. Only a soul scrupulously just, and a heart rigidly honest, could have given to so dismal a song an undertone so deep and articulate that, in its weird music, we seem to hear the shout of justice pronouncing the sentence against unrighteous deeds.

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### CHAPTER XXVI.

The sorrows of a life painfully dragged in exile has so embittered Dante, that the meeting of the Florentines in hell afforded him grim satisfaction together with a sense of joy and pleasure. Independent of the symbolic narrative, we know that his brain throbbed with tumultuous thoughts. Smarting under the pain of perpetual banishment, the Tuscan, filled with rancor and spite, lost no opportunity to place in various parts of the lower regions those who had contradicted the opinions of his impatient mind, opposed the stubbornness of his overbearing will, or had, in any way, contributed to his expulsion from the domestic hearth, and thrust him unknown, unappreciated, and unsought, to wander among strangers to learn by sad experience,

"How salt the savor is of other's bread :  
How hard the passage, to descend and climb  
By other's stairs." Par. XVII. 56.

The sight of ungrateful citizens condemned to dwell among unclean things, rouses a storm of indignation in the breast of the exile ; his verse glows with fiery denunciations and reproaches, with irony and sarcasm.

"Florence, exult ! for thou so mightily  
Hast thriven, that o'er land and sea thy wings  
Thou beatest, and thy name spreads over hell.

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Among the plunderers, such the three I found  
Thy citizens ; whence shame to me thy son,  
And no proud honor to thyself redounds."

Remounting the way that had led to the den of thieves, Vergil and his companion gain the bridge arching the eighth pouch, and, from thence, look down upon the punishment inflicted on another species of Fraud, achieved and consummated by perverting the noblest gifts of the mind to base and unworthy usages. Our author maintains that the abuse of brilliant talents is sure to produce a crafty and cunning disposition in the soul, which must needs become the source of untold evils to mankind when called into action and exercised in giving deleterious advice to others.

The fraudulent counselors are tormented here. The poet seems to regard this moral obliquity from two different standpoints of view. A distinction is made between the evil counselors who ply the dangerous trade for the combined interest of themselves and the person counseled, and those who on being asked give bad advice exclusively for the advantage of the party demanding it, no gain whatsoever accruing to them from the execution of the same.

Dante, teeming with poetical imagery, and endowed with unerring intuition in regard to modes of punishment due to certain transgressions, represents the sinners enfolded and hidden in separate flames, which, like the luminous exhalations of graveyards, flit to and fro in the midnight darkness of the valley. Firmly adhering to the philosophy of Aristotle that those having bright



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and keen intellects are mostly of a warm temperament, he envelops the perverters of natural gifts in moving fire. They are furthermore concealed in the burning shroud, and rendered invisible by it because the mischievous suggestions are invariably given in absolute secrecy. The symbol of fire is used to signify that as this element, by a natural tendency, leaps upwards so the desires of bad counselors constantly aim at personal elevation to be attained by the correlative depression of innocent victims. Fire consumes all, destroys all; once in action and full sway nothing can resist its power, nor retard its progress. Even so the deep schemes and subtle artifices skillfully devised by the clear-sighted minds of unscrupulous advisers carry everything before them. Neither the courage of Hector, nor the wisdom of Priam, nor the heroism of a brave nation, could save Troy from the wiles of Ulysses and Diomedes. Had Guido di Montefeltro really counseled Boniface VIII., the prestige of a great name, the disposal of princely wealth, and the strength of impregnable strongholds could not have prevented the fall of the powerful Colonnas.

Looking down in the deep and broad chasm, the poets see myriads of detached flames constantly flitting about like fire-flies gleaming in a field of a summer eve. As one draws near, enclosing Diomedes and Ulysses, from the latter Dante hears the story of his last adventures, and how having sailed past the Pillars of Hercules, the hero of Ithaca suffered shipwreck in far off and distant seas. Tennyson has immortalized in beautiful verse the

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tradition of the last of the Greeks, and the reader will find a striking similarity between the concluding part of this canto and the lyric gem "Ulysses" of the Laureate of England. Some commentators find in the episode a proof that Dante must have known or conjectured the existence in the Western Ocean of another world before the actual discovery of it by Columbus. The fact now almost universally admitted about the Northmen, having in the tenth century visited what they named the coast of Vineland, would seem to confirm the opinion. The rumor of this expedition had undoubtedly reached the ear of the Florentine, since hardly three hundred years intervene between Leifer, Thornwald, and Thorsin and the date of the Divine Comedy.

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### CHAPTER XXVII.

After the departure of the flame enfolding Ulysses and Diomedes, another arose from the gulf and came toward the poets. In that burning shroud, Guido di Montefeltro rued in eternal pains the consequences of a fraudulent counsel he had been constrained to give to cure the fever of a Pope's ambition. Dante who, as we have seen, had personal and political grievances against Boniface VIII., in the usual spirit of ruthless animosity, repeats in this canto a story circulated by the enemies of the Pontiff, and by few accepted as an established fact. The truth of the matter, however, is that in the clash of party strife some in the ranks of the Ghibellines did not hesitate to make use of the malicious report to injure the cause of their opponents—the Guelfs. We have heard of certain practices obtaining in America when the country or state suffers under that quadrennial or biennial visitation known under the name of political campaign. Italian Ghibellines and Guelfs of the thirteenth century are uterine brothers of American Republicans and Democrats of the twentieth century.

The charge put on the lips of Guido, if really true, would brand the name of any human being, other, even, than a Vicar of Christ, with eternal infamy. Fortunately for the dignity of mankind, the tale heard by the Tuscan in hell can be termed *his story* and not history at all.



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Set in a brass-plated frame dug from among the rubbish of apocryphal wares generally found in our modern second-hand stores, the narrative runneth thus.

Guido di Montefeltro, Count of Urbino, flourished in Italy about the second half of the thirteenth century. It would be difficult to determine if in the hand of this baron the pen, so to speak, was mightier than the sword. Gifted with a mind keener than the edge of his dagger, the lust of domination and power distilled from a richly endowed soul the essence of superfine malice and deception. Guido had no peer in evil, and easily won the distinction of being considered the ablest deceiver and the most accomplished knave of his time. Treaties and promises were to him as dicers' oaths, and he forged his way to eminence by trampling under foot any law human and divine. In the midst of triumphs and glory, the Count repented him of his sins, and bidding farewell to vanities and crimes exchanged the armor of the soldier for the garb of the monk. For years he had been engaged in works of penance and atonement within the walls of a Franciscan cloister, when the summons of the Pope dragged him from the solitude of his retreat into the busy scenes of a wicked world. Boniface, the disturber of the penitent's monastic peace, needed him and him alone, for he was at war with the Colonnas.

The members of this baronial family, defying the whole apostolic and cardinalitial bench, had intrenched themselves in their fortified castle of Palestrina, from which it became impossible to dislodge them. The Pope, unable to cope with such formidable opposition, despair-



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ing of success, tired of failure, and too impatient to sit any longer before the bastions of the enemy, sent for Guido to ask the advice of that past master in the dark arts of simulating truth and breaking faith. The monk is told to propose any means, any device, any plan, any treachery, no matter how deep and black, to put down the rebellion and bring about the ruin of the hated Colonnas. In virtue of the power of the keys, absolution for the sin is previously promised and, in fact, given in advance to the future criminal. After much hesitation and wrestling with conscience, Montefeltro finally uttered in a whisper the magic words that were to throw open the gates of the garrison and deliver the rebels into the hands of the tyrant.

"Large promises with performance scant, be sure,  
Shall make thee triumph in thy lofty seat."

The awful import of this Sibylline oracle in plain prosaic translation from the Italian means, that by making all sorts of fair promises beforehand, and breaking them soon afterwards—a kind of inversion of long and short—the much desired end could be attained. Jacopo and Pietro Colonna, both Cardinals of Holy Church, and other leaders of the opposition, fell in the snare; the contentions were amicably settled; the wooden horse treacherously entered the fated Ilium, and the children of darkness completely circumvented the children of light. The citadel of Palestrina was razed to the ground, and the once omnipotent Colonnas, their pride humbled, their

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estates destroyed, their goods confiscated fled for their lives and found refuge and safety in foreign countries.

The fever of the Pontifical patient having been cured, the services of the physician were no longer needed, and the meek friar returned to his cell and his prayers. Soon after Guido died. The good easy man sure of the validity and efficacy of the absolution granted by the tempter himself before the commission of the sin, prepared at once to start for heaven, especially as St. Francis had come down on earth to bear him company on the way. It now so happened that both the Count and the blessed Father had reckoned without his Satanic Majesty, who appeared on the spot to vindicate his claim to the possession of the monk's soul. The dark cherub and the bright seraph indulged in a scholastic passage-at-arms, but the dusky disputant proved himself a better dialectician and more skillful. He argued that this member of the holy Order was still guilty of a grievous sin contracted by giving fraudulent advice, for according to certain principles of moral theology, he who does not repent cannot be absolved, nor can repentance go together with the doing of the deed; that would imply a contradiction in terms. Having had the best of the argument, after a short peroration, the devil seized the trembling wretch and dragged him down to Minos. Hell's inexorable judge promptly pronounced the sentence, and by twisting his tail eight times around his body assigned him to the eighth pouch.

Such is the story which, stripped of all poetical accessories, lacks even the aprioristic appearances of prob-

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ability or possibility. A fact, to be accepted as true, must be authenticated by intrinsic and extrinsic evidences.

The extrinsic evidence in the case should be derived from the documentary records of the times when the disgraceful affair was supposed to have taken place. By the light of this criterion, we search in vain for a single contemporary writer who alludes to, or mentions it. It is absurd to suppose that, if true, the Colonnas would have refrained from proclaiming, at once, to the whole world the misdeed of their mortal enemy, whom they persecuted even after death. Of all those eating their bread or arrayed in their camp no one was found in Italy or in foreign countries to chronicle the shame of Boniface. So many years elapsed before the vague rumor orally bruited about by the jealousy and hatred of a few Ghibellines was finally crystallized in partisan annals that Tommaseo does not hesitate to dismiss the charge as a mere fabrication, a *romanzo storico* as he calls it.

To strengthen what may be called the line of negative argumentation, the absolute silence of contemporary writers on the subject, we turn to a brief examination of positive proofs.

The Umbrian chronicles of the Franciscan Order, dating from the thirteenth century and extant to this day, recite in a simple manner that Guido di Montefeltro came to Assisi in twelve-hundred and ninety-nine, and as a monk led a most exemplary life. Having died in the odor of sanctity, he was honored after



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death with the title of Blessed, and as such his memory is held among the sons of St. Francis. Extrinsic proofs, viz., recorded and authenticated facts of a contemporary nature, demonstrate that the accusation is not based on historical evidence.

Intrinsically, the story has no element whatever of credibility; it is improbable and it is not possible. Was it necessary to drag an old monk from his cell to procure the benefit of an advice which any average clever man with a lax conscience could have given after ten seconds reflection? Admitting the real ability of Boniface, and assuming for the sake of argument his wickedness, could he not have thought himself of duping his enemies with fair promises and a subsequent breach of faith? Really, the indictment is so incredible on its very showing that few apologists have taken the trouble of entering the lists, but among them the learned Tosti has wielded a facile pen and settled the question beyond the peradventure of a doubt.

As far as our poet is concerned, we can say of him that after his desertion of the Guelf cause, having heard of the libel put in circulation by a group of fanatical Ghibellines, he credited it and accepted the version as genuinely true. Previous to the evolution of his political convictions, he bore full testimony to the sincere conversion and repentance of Guido, and spoke with reverence of the holy death of the soldier-monk, comparing him to a Knight of the Round Table. In the "Convito" we read textually the following



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words: "Verily, Lancilotto, the Knight and our most illustrious Latin, Guido di Montefeltro, deemed it not proper to enter port with sails proudly spread. It was a wholesome thought thus to lower the sails of earthly enterprise." This passage shows that personal animosity followed in the wake of political change. Dante was too noble to stoop to a lie, his soul was too honest to have recourse to calumny, his temper was too heroic to use arrows dipped in venom to slay an enemy. If he made Montefeltro the denouncer of the crime of Boniface, he firmly believed, though on unreliable authority, in the guilt of both.

Does this admission contradict what has been predicated as to the unity and aim and scope of the Divine Comedy? By no means. The honor of the Church was very dear to the heart of the Florentine, and woe to the man that would try to make her appear what she was not. If Gaetani of Anagni, under the name of Boniface VIII., had been false to his call, to the duty of his office, and, as he believed, had attempted to tarnish in the eye of the world the reputation of the Bride of Christ all the invectives and contumely that hell vomited against him would not be strong enough nor too severe and harsh. Like certain bold lines in Gothic architecture, when considered in themselves and not as parts of the whole edifice, may produce unpleasant sensations, even so in our case, the here and there strident, almost over-powering phrases, seemingly breaking the musical sequence of the theme, are calculated to give a wrong impression if they are

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not related to the dominant note pervading and harmonizing the entire epic song. What an imperfect, perhaps, erroneous idea would the reader form of Dante's religious sentiments, more especially in regard to the veneration due to the office of the Roman Pontiff, if he were not to read this canto by the light of the following verses,

" . . . . . Be ye more staid,  
O Christians! not, like feather, by each wind  
Removable; nor think to cleanse yourselves  
In every water. Either testament,  
The old and new, is yours; *and for your guide,*  
*The shepherd of the Church.* Let this suffice  
To save you." Parad. V. 73-79.

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### CHAPTER XXVIII.

Having passed to the ninth pouch, Dante sees a spectacle so harrowing and heart rending that the accumulated carnage of all the wars which, at various epochs, defiled the fields of Apulia, pales into insignificance. A demon stands in the midst of a valley brandishing a sword with which he unremittingly strikes, cuts, and maims the sinners forced in turn to stand before him. The terrible blow having been dealt, they hurry away circling the doleful road till the wounds are healed; then each shade comes back to the executioner, and the same punishment is repeated.

That surging throng bears all kinds of gashes and gaping wounds, the law of retribution working differently in different classes of evil doers according to the degree of the offence. One has the breast cut open, the entrails protruding from the quivering cavity; the face of another is cleft from the chin to the forelock; the throat of a third is perforated; the tongue of one near by lies severed in the mouth; still another walks, holding up his head with his hand as the watchman, the lantern.

These are the sowers of that pernicious seed of divisions in families, in states, and in the Church of Christ. The punishment is typical of the nature of the sin, engendering domestic enmities, civil wars, and religious schisms. As their deeds rent asunder what

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God has joined together domestically, socially and religiously, so the retributive sword severs now the members of their bodies.

Dante places first and foremost in the pains of this chasm, the greatest sower of religious discord then known to him, Mahomet; his son-in-law, Ali is not far from the prophet. Fra Dolcino of the fanatical sect of the Fraticelli is soon to come thither. Curio who had urged Cæsar to cross the Rubicon, Pier da Medicina, Mosca, and Bertrand de Born who had scattered dissensions and scandals among families and communities, all expiate the crime in atrocious torments.

The poet is appalled by the scenes enacted in that charnel-house, and shrinks in horror from the gruesome sight. Vergil recalls at once the object of the journey,

“ . . . . . that he may make  
Full trial of their state.”

Reason demonstrates the necessity of submitting to the ordeal, in order to infer the enormity of the unrighteous deed, from the manner in which it is requited.

This canto cogently proves how strongly Dante condemned revolt against lawfully constituted authority. The inspiration of his “De Monarchia” finds here a forcible illustration. We see dramatized the theme of the sacred principle of authority without which Church and State cannot exist. In the light of this truth, the making of Dante, the morning star, the precursor of



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rebellion against spiritual authority, is an error to be excused only on the plea of superficial, very superficial knowledge of the Divine Comedy. Mr. Lowell could safely assert that futile are the efforts to make this genius of the Middle Ages say what he did not say, and what never entered his mind. There surely must be many men and women of literary aspirations who, having never enjoyed the privilege of a personal introduction to his writings, are acquainted with them merely by name and know the author by reputation. This supposition is prompted by charity, and may help to repress a smile when certain crude theories are dogmatically advanced on the subject with a show of self-assurance that passeth all understanding.

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### CHAPTER. XXIX.

Vergil, having noticed Dante gazing intently at the maimed shades and divined his thoughts, dissuades him from counting them ; their number is too great and the task hopeless, for,

"Two and twenty miles the valley winds  
Its circuit."

For the first time, a definite measure is given relating to any round or circle of the infernal abode. In the thirty-first canto, the circumference of the tenth pouch is specified to be exactly half that of the ninth, one of the ghosts, Master Adams, saying that,

"It circles around eleven miles. . . ."

From these two passages, we can form an idea of the vastness of the Dantesque Hell. If the circumference of each round, is but half that of the one immediately above it, ascending from the tenth pouch of the Malebolgie upwards, we find that the first has a circuit of five thousand six hundred and twenty-two miles. The large area thus calculated implies an enormous population, for only one of the four divisions of the city is considered here.

Standing on the arch that spanned the last gulf, Dante looks down in the depths of that prison from which rises a mighty wave of cries and lamentations.

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This is this place where are confined in torments falsifiers of things, actions, and words, divided in four classes, alchemists, personators, counterfeiters, and calumniators. Having descended below to the leftward, the poets see a multitude of sinners stretched out in various positions, piled up in a reeking mass of corruption, or propped against one another, whilst some crawl about like unclean things. Swollen with dropsy or slowly eaten away by leprosy, they are all burning and shaking with fever. A thick, disgusting stench exhales from pools of fetid matter and shreds of decaying flesh. It is an immense lazaret-house filled with human bodies in various stages of decomposition, barked by a tetter loathsome and vile. The wretches, maddened by a violent itch, scratch themselves so furiously that the scabs come off from the hardened skin like scales from the back of a fish.

The first to attract the attention of the pilgrims were those Mediæval apes of the Divinity, who through the process of alchemy had sought to make gold by changing the substance of baser metals. A punishment torments this class of prevaricators which is in keeping with the spirit and ideas of the times when Dante wrote. Leprosy and dropsy corrupt the humors flowing in healthy streams through the human body, the stench emanating from it being the effect of the disorder. The poet's sense of proportion between sin and its retribution makes the alchemists the victims of this distemper, because they strove to corrupt metals by modes and operations foul and offensive. The con-

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stant itch and the pain, consequent on the effort to allay it, symbolize that thirst for gold which made them pass sleepless nights in dark laboratories. In our days, when chemistry has achieved so many triumphs and bids fair to win still greater victories in the future, we are inclined to frown upon and look askant at the Tuscan for confining to frightful tortures the adepts in the art of alchemy, from which the genius of Lavoisier, knew how to distill the nectar of his science. Was not astronomy also evolved from the superstitious errors of astrology? But Dante did not condemn the alchemists merely as students of nature and explorers of her secrets; he reproved their folly, their ignorance, their senseless audacity, and placed them in hell because they presumed to arrogate to themselves the attributes of the Creator, and claimed powers beyond the reach of the creature. In the thirteenth and preceding centuries, men were found who not only pretended to make gold but also boasted of possessing the thaumaturgic gift of working miracles. In the practical demonstration of this absurd assumption, they had recourse to all sorts of subterfuges, superstitious devices, and did not even stop short at the evocation of spirits.

People have always liked to be imposed upon, and have often gone out of their way to become the willing victims of charlatanism. The law of supply and demand is at work today as it was centuries ago. The modern spiritualists, clairvoyants, and the rest of that ilk, who hire halls and rent rooms in the most fashionable streets of our cities find their worthy prototypes in



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the alchemists of the Middle Ages. They had dared much with a too credulous public, and Dante reports them shaking with fear at the mere sight of a mortal.

He finds two of these counterfeiterers sitting on the ground with their backs to one another. They are spotted from head to foot and, making pincers of their fingers, tear madly off the scabs from their itching bodies. One is Griffolino, an alchemist of Arezzo, a great swindler, who, for a stipulated sum of money, had promised to make a youth called Albero fly, Dædalus-like, through the air. His companion is Capocchio, a member of the same guild. This ghost admits and rues the fact that he, too, had tried to play the dangerous role of aping the Eternal.

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### CHAPTER XXX.

Dante perceives two shades wildly running through the leprous herd snapping and snarling like mad dogs or swine let loose from the sty. They belong to the second class of falsifiers, having counterfeited for evil purposes the persons of others. These sinners are invaded by a kind of frenzy which deprives them entirely of the use of reason. Having suppressed at times their individuality, they are now laboring under the effects of a mental malady. The fatal attempt to assume a false presentment resulted in the dire consequence of losing their own identity. The first of the two rabid spirits, observed by the poet, furiously attacked Capocchio, and dragged away his bloated body on the rough ground. It was Schicchi who had personated Buoso Donati in the making of a will, in order,

" . . . . that himself might gain,  
For his own share, the lady of the herd."

The other was the unnatural daughter of Cinyras, king of Cyprus.

The third category is composed of counterfeiters, properly so called, by whom the coin is tampered with, or so fashioned out of baser metal as to make the spurious substance pass current. They, like the alchemists, are miserably tortured with dropsy and fever, symbolic

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of the corruption practiced, and the insatiable desire for gold that prompted the deed. Consumed by the pangs of a burning thirst, they mournfully think of the brooks and springs making sweet music in the shady valleys of their native land and pant and yearn for a few drops from the cooling streams

Among these sinners is Master Adams, the counterfeiter of Romena. The upper part of his body is so disproportionately distended with dropsy that he has all the appearances of an immense lute.

The fourth and last class is made up of falsifiers of words, the vile calumniators whose deceiving speech sears the freshness of virtue itself—the thieves, who by robbing the jewel of a good name, filch that which is more precious than life, and enriches them not. They, too, the corruptors of a symbol based on the equation between the unseen thought of the mind and the spoken word of the mouth, are punished with such a fever and intensity of dropsical disorder that smoke issues from their swollen bodies as from a dunghill warmed by the sun on a frosty winter morning. Master Adams points out to the Florentine Potiphar's wife, the accuser of the chaste Joseph, and Sinon, the oath-breaking destroyer of Troy. The perjured Greek, offended by the remarks of the counterfeiter, smites him viciously. A contest of mutual recrimination follows, one casting up to the other the misdeeds of the past. Dante pauses and listens. For the first time, Vergil reproaches him and severely censures the act.

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" . . . . . Now beware. A little more  
And I do quarrel with thee. . . . .

To hear

Such wrangling is a joy for vulgar minds."

The reproach and the censure symbolize the judgment of reason condemning a right thinking man, bent on the pursuit of higher things, for listening to the bantering of two malefactors, or taking interest in their low wrangles.



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### CHAPTER XXXI.

The poets set out on their journey to the fourth region of the dolorous city, the last division of hell, toward which slope the concentric pouches of the eighth circle.

Here yawns the terrible pit, deep and dark, frozen fast in the icy embrace of Cocytus, where, as already stated in the eleventh chapter, the worst sinners are doomed to expiate their blackest crimes.

According to the Dantesque theory, there is a vast difference between two categories of sins equally conceived in, and born of Fraud. Sins of Fraud may be committed by breaking that faith which, in virtue of the common law of nature, man is bound to keep with all his fellow beings, severally or collectively taken. The breach of this faith is punished in the graduated torments of the Malebolgie. Again, from the iniquity of Fraud, a more heinous offspring may issue, a moral monster, so appalling and horrid, that passing through the various declensions of human malice, and going beyond, finally becomes incarnate in an angel—Lucifer, the fallen star. To the natural faith and general obligations binding man to man, in the sense explained above, may be added a promised faith or special obligations necessarily and essentially resulting from certain conditions and relations existing between two rational beings or set of beings, such as the faith due to

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kindred, country, friends, and benefactors. A sin of this kind, Dante calls treason, and he now gropes his way with Vergil to the abode of the traitors where

"There

Was less than day and less than night."

The sound of a horn re-echoes through the crepuscular air; looking in the direction whence it came, the astonished Tuscan sees what appeared in the distance to be outlines of lofty towers. The Roman informs him that they are living giants condemned for high treason to be eternally bound in chains around the gaping jaws of the chasm. Their dimensions are so huge that they stand above the walls of the pit from the navel up, whilst their feet rest on the surface of the frozen river below.

Drawing near the brink, they hear the meaningless gibberish of Nimrod, he who built the tower of Babel to defy Heaven: Ephialtes, Antaeus, Briareus, and many others crown with their bodies the battlements of the prison.

The original purpose is, as usual, carried out to lay before the mind's eye a system of moral doctrines beautifully and artistically elaborated with symbolic materials taken alike from the facts of Scripture and the fables of mythology; just as Christian architecture does not hesitate to borrow the wealth of pagan art to enhance the external splendor of the very religion built on the ruins of Polytheism. Most of the giants alluded to in this canto, are the airy substance of classic dreams.

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These sons of the earth, rising up in Titanic strength to dethrone the powers of heaven, and destroyed in the attempt by the bolt of the god, are meant as a symbol of the rebellion of the finite against the Infinite, the created against the Eternal. Their ineffectual piling up of mountain on mountain to scale Olympus, is a type of the daring of the human mind to lift the veil, to rush in and contend with that divine wisdom whose brightness must needs be for its limited vision an abyss of darkness. The revolt of the giants points to the treason of the creature against the majesty of the sovereign Lord. The author of "*De Monarchia*" uses the same sign to hold up to the execration of mankind those tyrants and mighty ones of the world who had treacherously attacked the authority, and striven to undermine the power of Popes and Emperors. From the beginning, Vergil's leading of Dante through the realms of the dead had been rendered very difficult by many obstacles retarding and opposing the progress of his beloved ward. Charon, the gloomy ferryman of Acheron; Minos, the judge of hell; Phlegyas; the evil spirits at the gates of the second region; the Minotaur at the pass of the seventh circle; the Centaurs, Geryon; the Malebranche and the giants; besides innumerable other dangers and perils are registered in almost every page of this first part of the *Divine Comedy*. The faithful guide overcomes all impediments; he encourages and reassures Dante in moments of fear and weakness; he strengthens his infirm purpose when dismayed, and raises his drooping spirits when depressed;



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now by gentle kindness and overflowing tenderness, again by severity and command, even in anger by reproach and censure, the pilgrim is sustained along the hard road to the final goal.

In the music of his allegorical verse, we hear continually the refrain of one great theme; the song has but one burden, and it conveys the same lesson. Human reason moved by supernatural impulse speaks to the conscience of man urging and pleading, upbraiding and approving, condemning and praising. The will, a blind faculty of the soul, enlightened by reason, sees the right path and follows it. Hardships and fatigue must be borne; terrible scenes, the sight of pains, torments, agonies, and blood must be endured; the cry of anguish, the howl of despair, the curse of hatred, must be heard in order to be convinced of the justice of the equation existing between the law and the sanction of the law, the guilt and the retribution of the guilt. No labor, no toil must be thought too great to purchase a knowledge of such far reaching importance. The arduous and self imposed mission that Dante had proposed to himself was to impart to the world the results of his own meditations. The luminous and rhythmic thought was to vibrate to the music of the highest poetry. The inspiration from a woman impelled him to undertake the mystic journey. When faint and discouraged and bowed down by the magnitude of the task, Grace and Theology and Reason smiling through the eyes of Beatrice and speaking through the lips of Vergil urge on whispering, that all efforts must be accounted as noth-



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ing to become true, good, and morally beautiful, helpful to others, a teacher, and a bright example.

The reader will have noticed that in proportion as progress is made toward the central part of hell greater difficulties are encountered, and that to overcome them more powerful means must be employed. Giants stand guard around the pit and nothing less than the almost superhuman strength of one of them can lower the bold travellers to the frightful depths. These poetic figures set forth the increasing difficulties of treating a subject so deep as the malice of sin and its corresponding penalty till it oversteps the borders of the human and reaches the perfection of evil in an angelic nature.

The African Antaeus having dared to measure himself in combat only with a demigod, Hercules the son of Neptune, and not with the Olympian gods, has been allowed to remain unfettered. At the request of Vergil, the giant stretches out his hand, binds securely the poets in a mighty grasp, and describing a vertiginous curve safely sets them down on the frozen waters below.

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### CHAPTER XXXII.

Dante shudders at the sight of the infernal pit, bleak, dismal, and oppressively silent. Cocytus, the fourth river of hell, overflows, like a mighty sea, the whole breath of the region; it is frozen so hard that even the fall of a mountain upon it could not break the solid mass. Eternal, piercing cold pervades the gloomy recesses of that cavern—the den of traitors. It is divided into four rounds, in which various degrees of treason are punished with a progressive increase of pain.

According to the measure of the guilt, some sinners are completely covered by the ice-bound flood; others are plunged into it up to their heads, shoulders or navel; again some have their livid faces turned upwards or downwards, either standing straight or bent forward, "with face to feet arched like a bow."

The first circle the poet calls *Caina*, from Cain who did the first murder and killed his brother; in it, are confined traitors to kindred. The second is *Antenora*, from Antenor who betrayed his native city to the enemy; in it, are traitors to their country. The third is *Ptolemaea*, from Ptolemy, a king of Egypt who betrayed his friend and guest Pompey, or perhaps from Ptolemy of Palestine, who slew at a banquet Simon the Hasmonæan and his sons; this is for traitors to their friends. The fourth is *Giudecca*, from Judas Iscariot

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who betrayed his master; this is for traitors to their benefactors—the blackest crime of all.

Immersed in the ice-flood of Cocytus, these breakers of given faith gnash their teeth and shiver with intense cold. The extreme pain they endure forces copious tears to their eyes which instantly become frozen, blinding them and changing into new torments what nature meant to be the soothing balm of suffering.

At first, it would seem strange that Dante, being a fervent Christian, should substitute here a lake of ice for the traditional fire of hell, especially as he was well versed in biblical lore and must have known the celebrated passage of St. Matthew in the eighteenth chapter of his Gospel. The apparent contradiction, however, serves to prove that his intellectual penetration equalled the religious devotion of his soul. Scientific conclusions, based on authenticated experiments, have fully demonstrated that the action of extreme cold on the human body is similar in all respects to that produced by extreme heat; in fact, pain is more violently felt when occasioned by intense cold than by a corresponding degree of heat. The accuracy of the symbolism employed to set forth the torments of the lowest pit rests also on the authority of the Fathers of the early Church, who hold the opinion that the damned may suffer simultaneously all kinds of different pains even those of a most conflicting nature. This assertion has been loudly ridiculed in our days by a coterie of veneered scientists on the plea of impossibility.

The mode of punishment excogitated for the guilt of



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treason is marvelously adapted to the offence according to the plan of the poem. This iniquity, abominable in the sight of God and man, can only spring into existence by killing the germ of the noblest and holiest emotions; its survival is conditional to the necessary atrophy of every sentiment of love, every feeling of gratitude.

Running the full gamut of human perversion, it becomes the quintessence of egotism, which like a killing frost nips in the bud the tender flower of devotion, affection, and unselfishness. Cold and rigid as Cocytus, the operation of the mind thus utterly corrupted contracts the expansion of the heart, steeling it against every virtue, hardening it in every crime. The contrast between the joyful existence of the elect and the sorrowful misery of the damned is artistically arranged, the antithesis is poetically perfect. The joys of heaven are quickened by a pure ray that warms and enlightens, the sorrows of hell are fed by darkness and cold. Transcendent happiness irradiates the countenance of the blessed, unspeakable wretchedness distorts the visage of the accursed "shaped into a doggish grin." Expansion is the property of light and heat; from their elemental action springs the harmony and beauty of the universe—the finite symbol of the Infinite—the shadow of the eternal Reality. Contraction is the attribute of cold and darkness, the efficient principle of confusion and disorder, the type of blind chaos physical and moral. Love reigns in the empyreal, hatred in the infernal regions, "a land of misery and



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darkness where the shadow of death and no order but sempiternal horror dwelleth." (Job X. 22.) In these concluding cantos, we can almost hear the echo of Arabia's inspired song.

Walking on the surface of the frozen lake, the poets see the ice-bound shades trembling in the eternal chill. It is the first circle of the awful pit, the Caina inhabited by traitors to kindred. Here Dante sees a vast multitude, and mentions only the two sons of Alberto degli Alberti, guilty of fratricide; Mascheroni and Camicion de'Pazzi, who had slain their relatives.

Awed and shivering, he closely follows his guide, and enters the second circle called Antenora.

"Among thousand faces made currish by the cold" appear Bocca degi Abati, Buosa da Duera and other traitors to their country.

Going further, the Tuscan notices two shades frozen together. One is burying his teeth in the skull of the other with all the fury of maddened hunger. Being asked the reason why he is so savagely occupied, a tale of woe is elicited from the culprit.

Goethe pronounced the form in which the following episode is set the sublimest lyric creation known in any literature.

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### CHAPTER XXXIII.

Wiping his mouth on the hair of the skull, the sinner, interrupting the fell repast, told Dante that he was Count Ugolino of Pisa, and that his ill-assorted companion was Ruggiero degi Ubaldini, the Archbishop of the same city.

The substance of the facts narrated is based on ancient chronicles of the thirteenth century.

During a war between Genoa and Pisa, the Count, to retain the primacy of civil and military authority in his native city, broke faith with the enemy by violating the sanctity of a truce. This base act of treachery, prompted by lust of domination, bore heavily upon some of his fellow citizens held as hostages in the strongholds of the Genoese. To the first offence, his cold blooded egotism subsequently added a second. To bring about the ruin of Visconti associated with him in the direction of political affairs, he left the Guelf party and went over to the Ghibellines headed by Ruggiero. With their aid, having succeeded in getting rid of the hated rival, the audacity and boldness of this unscrupulous Pisan knew no longer any bounds. He now refused to admit the Archbishop to any share in the direction of public affairs. A civil commotion followed; the Ghibellines rose up in arms; abandoned by the Guelfs he had so shamefully betrayed, Ugolino was easily defeated; the cruel faction intoxicated with

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victory, and goaded on by hatred, immured him, his two sons Gaddo and Uguccione, his two nephews Brigata and Anselmuccio, in the tower of the Gualandi; threw the keys of the prison in the river Arno and left them there to die of starvation. The children slowly pined away and miserably perished one by one before the eyes of the distracted father. Left alone, "fasting got at last the mastery of grief," and he, too, fell dead among them, a victim of his own and his enemies' treachery.

Having heard the details of the horrible tale, the poets passed on in silence, and entered the third circle, the Ptolemaea, where traitors to their friends "stood blue pinched and shrined in ice."

At this juncture, Dante feels a breath of wind visiting his face. Being in the center of the earth, he is greatly surprised; Vergil explains the cause of the phenomenon. They were, in fact, drawing near the spot where Lucifer, breast high, over the frozen flood fanned with his gigantic wings hell's turbid air.

The cry of a shadow startles the sad pilgrim. It is Brother Alberigo of the "Jolly Friars," the slayer of his guests, who implores him to lift up for a moment the congealed veil from his eyes that he may find some relief in the free flow of tears. Dante, who was well acquainted with him in the upper world, and knew that he was still alive, is struck dumb with amazement. The sinner volunteers to solve the mystery, and ironically declares that the immortal part of traitors of his kind often enjoy the privileges of being tormented in the



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Ptolema long before the body becomes tenantless. No sooner has the prevaricator conceived and consummated the deed of treason than his spirit is hurled to the depths of the infernal pit whilst a demon enters into, and quickens the mortal frame till the time arrives set by the Supreme Arbiter for its natural dissolution.

This punishment is undoubtedly of a very striking originality; it supposes the soul of a man to be already in hell at the same time that his body animated and vivified by an evil spirit moves and acts and apparently retains its modes of former existence on earth.

Tommasео remarks that the following passages of Scripture may have given occasion to the elaboration of this poetical concept; "Let them go down alive into hell." . . . (Psal. LIV.) "Thou hast the name of being alive, and thou art dead." (Apoc. Capt. III.) "And when he had dipped the bread, he gave it to Judas Iscariot, the son of Simon. And after the morsel, Satan entered into him." (John XIII.)

Be that as it may, it is plain that Dante proposes here the unnatural and premature separation as a symbol of impenitence presumable, according to him, in sinners guilty of such heinous offences. He is of the opinion that prevaricators of this stamp are so hardened in crime and iniquity, that, though living yet in a state of probation, they are, in reality, dead to the saving influence of grace.

According to the teachings of Catholic theology, no Christian is warranted in the belief that during the



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days of the flesh he is confirmed in grace, is impeccable and, consequently, that he can be infallibly sure of his eternal salvation without a special revelation from God. The very same applies to the converse proposition in regard to reprobation or rejection, withal experience shows how difficult it is for proditorious souls to be cured, to be cleansed of a turpitude that seems to poison the very springs of moral life. Conversions are not frequent; even the gentle whisperings of Heaven often fall on deaf ears. History records a most frightful example. Twenty centuries ago, one step, one word, one tear, would have been sufficient to draw upon the head of an offender the pardon of the victim of his ingratitude; but the traitor did not take that step, did not speak that word, did not shed that tear, and Judas "went and hanged himself."

In Holy Writ, we are told that there is a period in the career of sin when the full measure of malice is filled. Verily, it is not given to man, aye, it is not even permitted to him to judge and to condemn the individual. We can not possibly know what may pass at the last moment between the creature and the Creator; yet the truth of the general proposition holds good, and Dante was right; as he went beyond the limits of time, he could give an account of the unchangeable degrees of Eternity.

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### CHAPTER XXXIV.

Having described the various species of Fraud considered as treason to kindred, country, and friends, the culminating perfection of its malice is about to find a fearful incarnation in him who,

"Lifted up his brow against his Maker."

The poets have come to the last round called Giudecca. Standing on the threshold of that lowest pit where converge all the circles of the prison, Vergil prepares Dante for the awful scenes soon to be witnessed. He tells him to arm himself with fortitude for the banners of the Prince of Darkness are already floating over the fields of ice. His companion, faint with fear, discerns the form of hell's Monarch,

"That emperor who sways

"The realms of sorrow."

There he stood, breast high, in the frozen river colossal in proportions, repulsive in appearance, bearing on the scowling brow the scar of the eternal curse. Not even the defiance of unabashed pride did lend a redeeming trait to the hideousness of that outcast who amid the splendor of angelic choirs had once been radiant and eminent in beauty. It is the biblical Satan and no other, inspiring no sentiment of compassion, quickening no feeling of admiration or sympathy. Milton's conception, classic and Oriental

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dreams pale before the Dantesque vision of the living synthesis of evil.

On shoulders broad and gigantic, rested a formidable head with three faces. The color of the one in the middle was flaming red; the one to the right of a yellowish white; and the left was black. The different colors are emblematic of the fatal influence exercised by Lucifer over the people of the then known parts of the world, Europe, Asia and Africa. To establish an antithesis, however imperfect, between essential goodness and its absolute negation, the poet opposes to the Trinity of Persons in the Godhead a trinity of attributes in the archdemon,—impotence, ignorance, and hatred. Over the gates of hell, Dante had read,

"To rear me was the task of *power* divine  
Supremest *wisdom* and primeval *love*."

Against these perfections of the Divine Persons, power, wisdom, and love, vainly do strive impotence, ignorance, and hatred bodied forth in the three faces of the fiend red with impotent rage, black with abysmal nescience, and white with corroding envy. From under each face, issued a pair of enormous wings plumeless and webbed like the bat's. The flapping of these sail-shaped fans produced three currents of biting wind which froze the waters of Cocytus. From his eyes, torrents of tears, telling no tale of noble sentiments, and streams of bloody slaver flowed on the shaggy surface of the Titanic frame.

With the teeth of the mouth set in the middle, the



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monster champed and gnawed the traitor Judas. This sinner was engulfed within the yawning cavern in such wise that the lower part of his body and the quivering limbs miserably dangled without. On the contrary, the head and breast of Brutus and Cassius hung outside of the mouths to the right and left of the front face. Greater, as it was meet, were the torments of Iscariot.

According to Dante's opinions advanced in his "De Monarchia," man's present welfare and future happiness depend on his obedience and submission to the heads of two institutions symbolized by the keys and the sword. Treason, to these powers supreme in spiritual and temporal affairs, he regards as the greatest sin of which a human being can possibly be guilty. Pursuant to this conviction, and in illustration thereof we have in this, the lowest of the lower circles of hell, the highest penalty inflicted on Judas, because of his betrayal of Christ, the founder of the Church, varying only in degree from that imposed on Brutus and Cassius who murdered Caesar, the founder of the Empire. The minister of the punishment is the archtraitor who rebelled against God. He it was that put it into their hearts to do the deed, and now rejoices in tormenting them, although himself crushed under the weight of the fatal consequences of treason.

Sin, in all its forms and degrees, and the retribution due to it, has been laid bare to the mind of Dante till the very climax of malice and the perfection of evil has been reached in the uttermost depths of the in-



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✱ ✓ fernal pit. The object, of the journey through the regions of the unrepentant dead, has been accomplished. The pilgrim has seen and brought home to his innermost consciousness the nature, the deformity, the import of deeds perpetrated against the light of reason and faith, and left unforgiven because the sinner deliberately chose to die in open revolt to the Divine Will without sorrow, without regret. He has jealously treasured up in his heart all that he saw and heard to tell his brethren, in order, that hearing and believing they may repent and live.

Vergil warns him that they must now depart from the abode of despair. Before meeting Beatrice, who is to be his guide in the realms of love, he must lead him through another dolorous city. Hope, however, is written on its portals. The sufferings endured there possess a purifying virtue, and of their duration there shall be an end; they are inflicted and cheerfully borne as a punishment for the temporal penalty due to offences whose eternal guilt has been remitted ere death cut down the living tree.

With the Tuscan firmly clasped in his embrace, the Roman descended through the ice along the shaggy flanks of Satan treading his way painfully and carefully between the frozen crusts of Cocytus and the matted hair of the monster. Having attained to that part of Lucifer which corresponded exactly with the center of the earth, Vergil reversed his course, by turning completely over, and began to ascend, for the goal of their journey was the Antarctic pole. After

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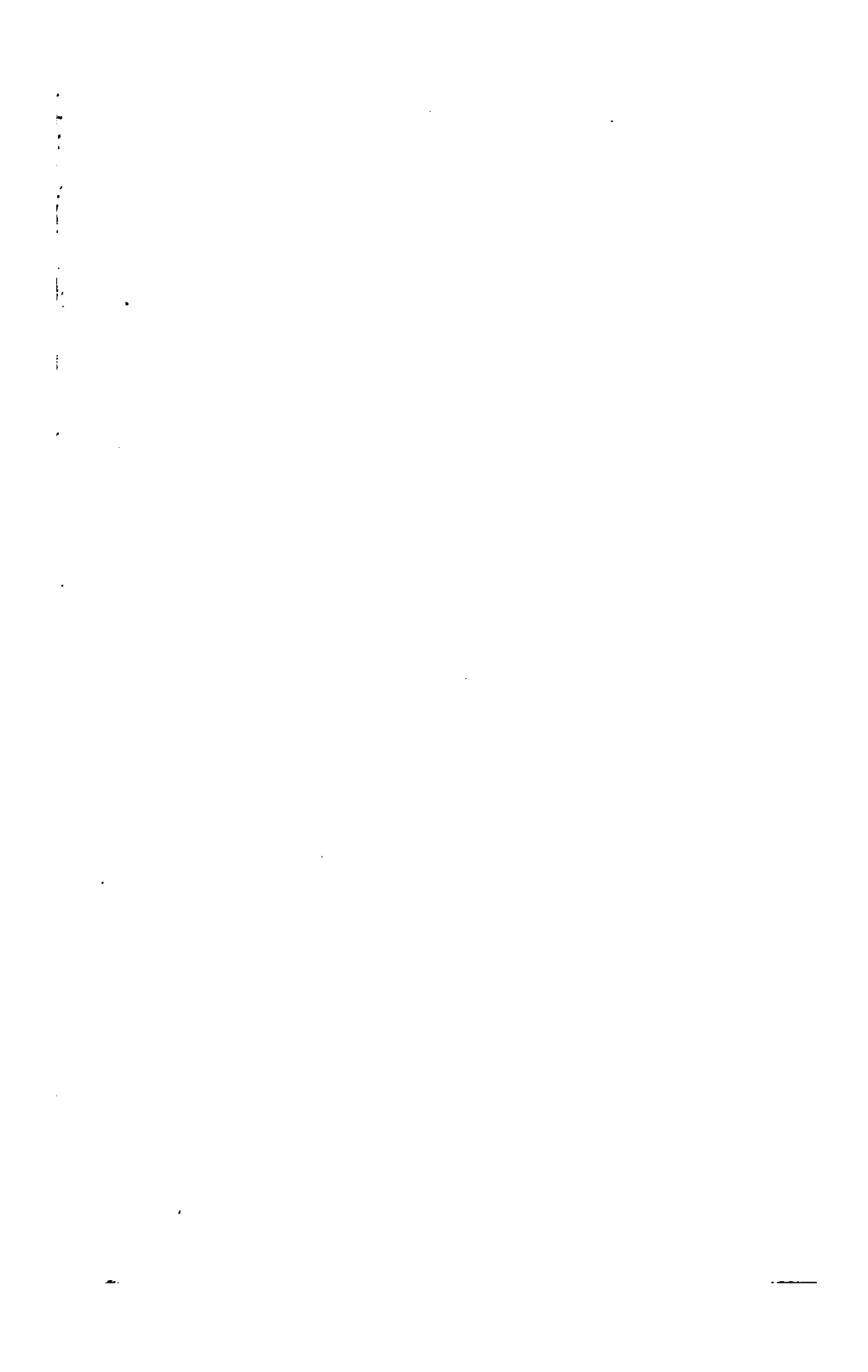
much labor and fatigue, symbolizing the efforts necessary to escape the pains of the eternal prison, they finally came to a rocky cave, circular in shape and antipodal in location to the Giudecca, stretching out toward the opposite hemisphere, and in length equal to the depth of hell.

Dante, following the cosmogonic theories of his time, imagined that when hurled down from heaven Lucifer fell with such force on the surface of the uninhabited earth that he pierced it to the center, and remained enthroned there as the sovereign of the kingdom of evil. That part of the earth displaced by the demon crashing through it, trembling with fear, fled from the unholy contact and went to form in mid-ocean the Mount of Purgatory whose summit is crowned with the terrestrial Paradise.

On that dark road whose solemn stillness was only broken by the murmuring sound of a streamlet, Dante, wrapt in meditation and haunted by harrowing memories, followed Vergil. At last, the sorrowful pilgrimage begun on the night of Good Friday came to an end in the early hours of Easter Monday morning, and issuing forth into the upper world the poets

"Again beheld the stars."

FINIS.

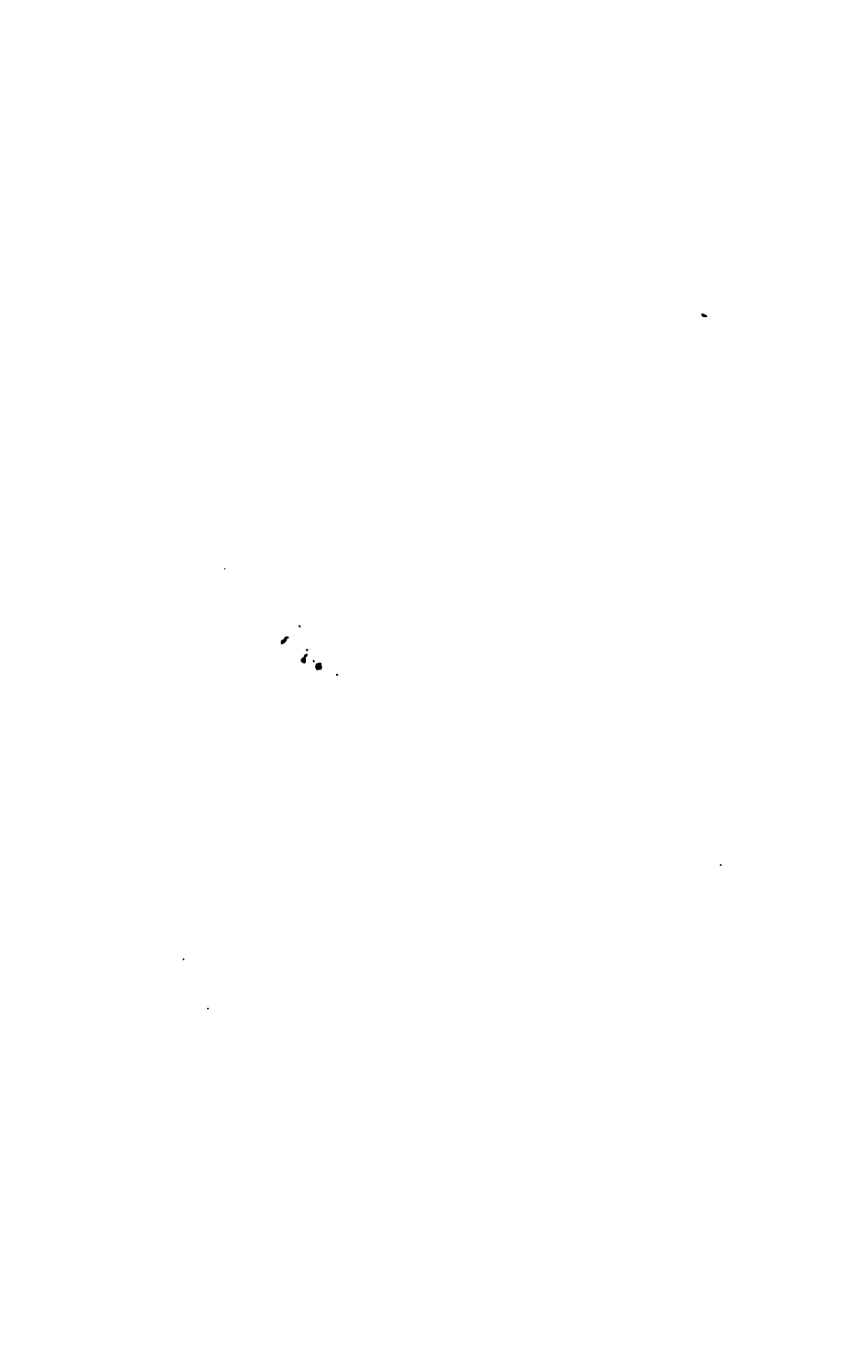


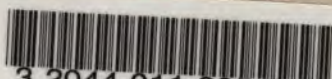












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